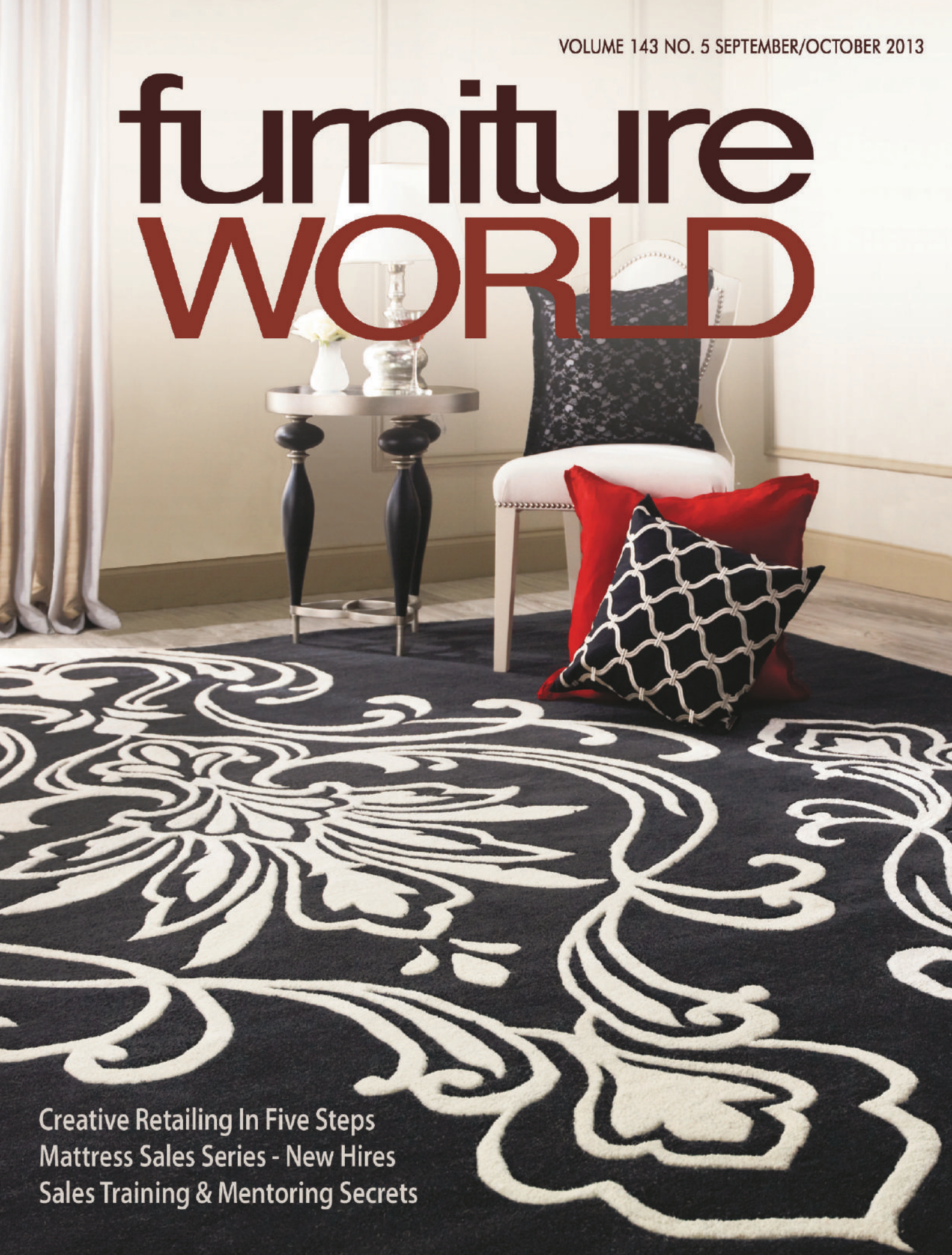


VOLUME 143 NO. 5 SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2013

furniture WORLD



Creative Retailing In Five Steps
Mattress Sales Series - New Hires
Sales Training & Mentoring Secrets



Tasman TAS-4508



POUF-76



TMT-8302



Denali DEN-5002 • LD-038, P-0279, RC-002 • POUF-76



RC-003

Denali DEN-5001



At once rustic and relaxed, the expressive designs of Berber Bazaar spotlight a fresh interpretation of nomadic styles found in Morocco and across the Near East—brought into the home through the thoughtful use of inspired rugs, pillows and other accent décor. Rugged textures and undyed yarns lend a welcome contrast to the clean lines of a modern living space and further highlight the imperfect beauty of artisan-crafted goods. In this type of environment, each unique piece has its own story to tell—blending to create an overarching aesthetic that's rooted in both traditional and eclectic global styles.

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Berber Bazaar



RC-002

TOB-1005



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Oasis OAS-1103



INSPIRED *by* Travel *Catalonia*

Vibrantly colored and featuring highly patterned designs, stunning tile motifs reveal an intricate attention to detail inspired by Antonio Gaudí and the Modernisme movement that began in the late 19th century. Geometric and ornate architectural shapes create a feeling that is at once harmonious and celebratory. Evoking the worldly sophistication of finely crafted mosaics and glazed ceramic tiles, the rugs and pillows from this trend harness the power of repetition to bring a sense of history and traditional style to contemporary living environments.

KS-009



Goa G-5086 • CV-009, FF-046, RG-009

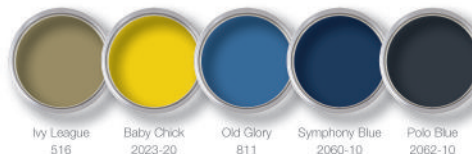
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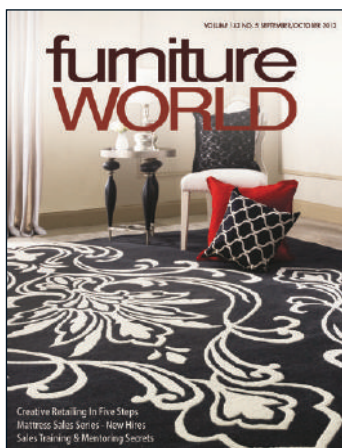
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FURNITURE WORLD MAGAZINE

The Business Solutions Magazine For Furniture Retailers

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Cover: Part of the Modern Classics Collection by Candice Olson for Surya, the sophisticated CAN-1951 hand-tufted rug design features a stylized fleur-de-lis motif in cream set against a charcoal background. Luxurious accent pillows P-0716, SL-007 and HCO-606 further accentuate the design's classic meets contemporary style. Explore more of Surya's latest offerings on page one and six of this issue or visit www.surya.com.

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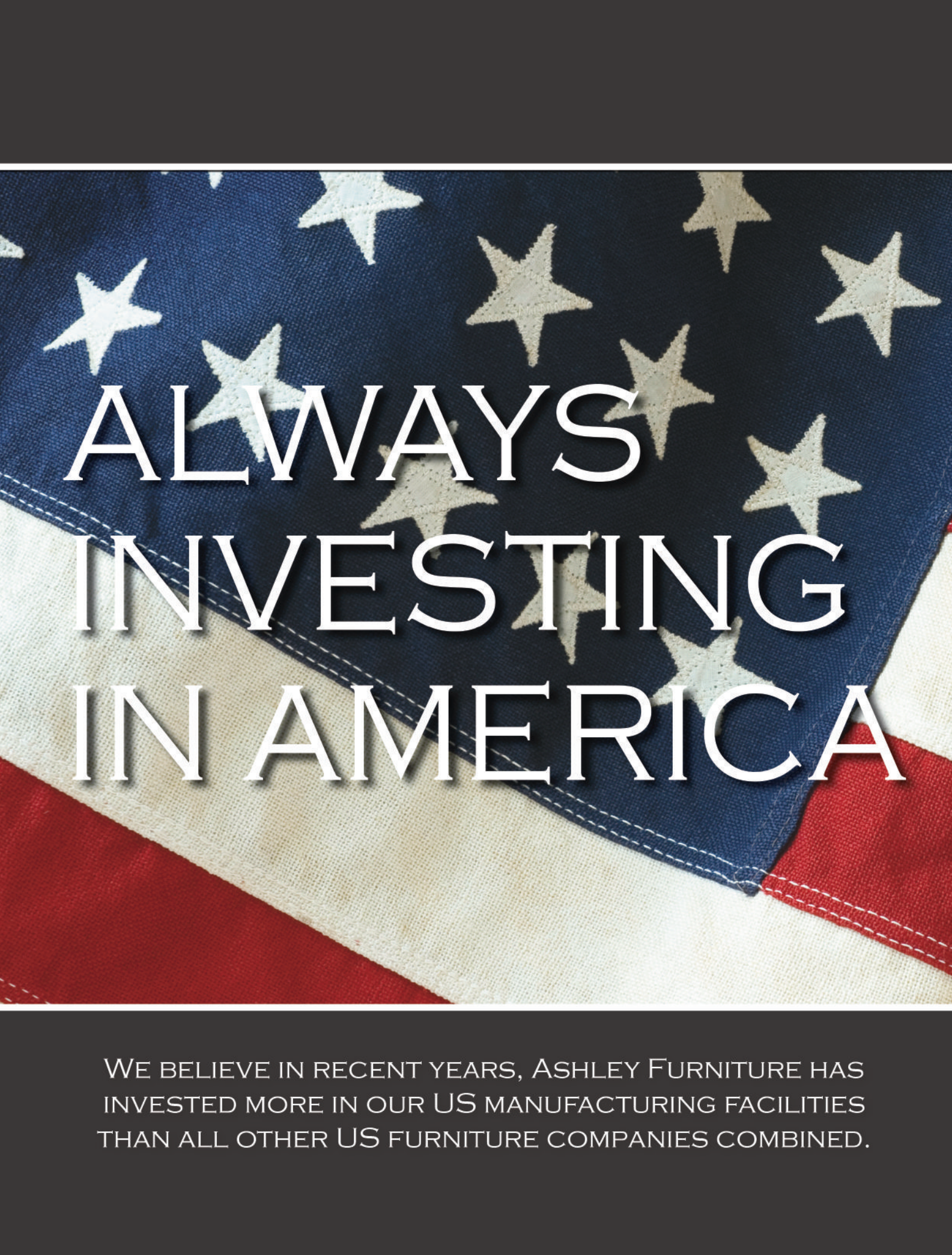
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EDITOR'S CORNER

The Best Get-Away
At High Point Market

For those of you who make the biannual trek to High Point, I encourage you to visit the Bernice Bienenstock Furniture Library located at 1009 North Main Street, just a mile or so north of the Market's center.

Having recently undergone a complete interior renovation, it's a unique venue where furniture and interior designers, students, market visitors and researchers can rest, find design inspiration, conduct classes and host seminars/events.

The Library contains the world's largest research collection of over 5,000 volumes on the history and design of furniture, interiors, architecture, textiles, finishes and construction.

Plans have recently been finalized and fundraising begun for a new project, the Pat Plaxico Gardens. The garden will unify the Library's interior and exterior spaces, offering additional room for study, contemplation and events.

Also underway are additional \$10,000 student design awards to help nurture exceptional design talent in our industry.

So please visit and use this exceptional industry resource. Call Karla Webb, Library Director at 336-883-4011 or email info@furniturelibrary.com for more information on using the Library or to offer support by becoming a "Friend of the Library".

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WORLD

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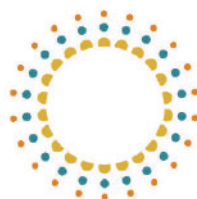
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SALES METRICS COACHING

The pitfalls of coaching on dependent sales metrics.

by Hal McClamma

THE BAD NEWS: Eight out of ten furniture stores do not know how to set their own sales teams up for success.

THE REALLY BAD NEWS: The really bad news has three parts:

- A very high percentage of retailers do NOT even have professional sales people... they have order takers. Most stores with order takers would do better to place "Take To Cashier" tags on their merchandise.
- Most stores do not have REAL sales managers and coaches.
- Believe it or not, most stores do not have a selling system/sales training program.

THE GOOD NEWS: If you have an ineffective salesperson or sales team, there is a great opportunity for you to obtain large sales increases.

THE SCENARIO: Consider a four-legged stool. If one leg is missing, it will not stand properly. If two are missing, forget it. Like a four-legged stool, proper and effective retail sales teams have four strong supporting legs. I am sure you've heard the phrase, "Plan, execute, review & coach". This phrase describes an effective sales team. First, there is a plan... a sales training selling system. Second, the salesperson executes the plan with customers. Third, there is a review of the results. Finally, there is the 4th leg, which is coaching.

Just like a four-legged stool, if any leg is missing in your store's selling processes, sales will fall short of their potential. Most stores can achieve huge sales increases just by moving their sales teams from the realm of the ineffective to the effective. The sales process is a four-step process... plan, execute, review and coach. Let's look at each of the four steps.

THE 1ST LEG... A PLAN

The plan is a selling process or system that is engineered and designed to make a sale. The best selling system for the home segment -- furniture, appliances, electronics and flooring - is a trust based, non-manipulative, no pressure, controlled, relational selling system. A selling system is a choreographed sales process that starts at the greeting and proceeds in a planned, proactive and intentional manner all the way through making the sale and post-sale follow up. A great selling system overcomes all objections before they occur. And a great selling system maximizes the foot traffic opportunity presented to your sales staff.

If your store does not have a selling system, shame on you. In fact, a store comprised of 10 salespeople with no pre-set selling system may actually have as many as 20-30 different selling systems because the salespeople

"Most retailers capture dependent sales performance metrics such as sales volume, traffic, average sale, etc., but stand-alone, this data is not very useful."





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"Have you ever had a friend or acquaintance walk into your store and you said to yourself, 'I hope Katie is up. I sure don't want Jimmy helping them.'"



change what they do throughout the year. When a salesperson is in a slump, they change what they do.

In addition, a store with no selling system will experience a very wide range of salesperson performance. This means that each customer will receive a different experience in your store depending upon who greets them at the door.

Have you ever had a friend or acquaintance walk into your store and you said to yourself, "I hope Katie is up. I sure don't want Jimmy helping them." My question is...WHAT IS JIMMY DOING GREETING ANYONE if you don't believe in his abilities?

Great sales training programs are based upon the law of cause and effect. This law states that if you find a successful high achieving sales professional and you duplicate what he or she does, you will achieve similar results, with the only variables being attitude and tenure.

THE 2ND LEG... EXECUTE

After a salesperson is trained to master each step in a selling system and understands the rationale behind each step, she is ready to execute the plan "live" with customers.

THE 3RD LEG... REVIEW

There are two facets to the review process. First review the sales performance metrics, Then review or observe the salesperson's interactions with the customers.

PRECEDENT METRICS

Performance metrics are split into two very distinct categories, precedent and dependent. Dependent metrics are called dependent because they depend upon something happening; these metrics are the end results. Precedent metrics are called precedent because they measure the cause rather than end results. If coaches focus on proper causes as measured by precedent metrics, effects will take care of themselves.

Key Point: Dependent metrics are derived from sales and traffic numbers. Precedent metrics are derived from observing the salesperson.

The most recognized retail performance metrics are dependent sales performance metrics such as sales volume, traffic, average sale, close percent, hours worked, sales per hour, items sold, average items per ticket, and average item retail. Most retailers capture some if not all of these, but stand-alone, this data is not very useful in coaching performance improvement.

It is difficult to coach from dependent metrics alone. They provide insight regarding what to look for when observing a salesperson's interaction with customers, but it is the measurement and coaching of precedent metrics that creates real performance improvement.

Many sales managers tell me they are coaching when in fact, they are simply reviewing dependent sales

reports with the sales staff. Reviewing performance numbers is NOT coaching. Passing out reports is not coaching. Coaching with dependent performance metrics is frustrating for the coach and equally frustrating for salespeople. And, it creates no long lasting performance increase.

Consider a baseball pitching coach who solely focuses on Jimmy and his high ERA, low strike count, high number balls & bases on balls and their unacceptable wins and losses rather than the skills that cause these undesirable numbers.

WARNING: The cure is not in "yelling and telling" the dependent reports and stats. Imagine a pitching coach saying, "Jimmy, you need to reduce your balls and increase your strikes." Jimmy will say, "Duh coach...I know my stats....how do I decrease my balls and increase my strikes?...just tell me what to do coach!"

THE SECRET REVEALED: There is a reason to monitor these dependent metrics because they tell the coach what to look for. Precedent performance metrics, however, are the most important metrics utilized for coaching sales performance improvement. (Or pitching performance in the game of baseball)

A pitching coach observes all key facets of a pitcher's delivery... things like release point, stance, windup, foot alignment and shoulder alignment. All of these nuances affect where balls pass over home plate.



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Salesperson	Traffic	Improper Greeting	Disconnect Rate		Traffic	Proper Greeting	Disconnect Rate
Jim	50	41	60.0%		47	42	32.0%
Anna	61	57	41.0%		56	54	21.0%
Margaret	46	40	42.0%		48	37	23.0%
Phil	58	49	57.0%		52	46	21.0%
Macie	52	41	63.0%		57	52	26.0%
Gerald	44	38	36.0%		308	277	24.7%
Total	311	266	49.8%		308	277	24.7%

The chart shows a 60-day view; 30-days prior and 30-days after teaching the appropriate greeting to the sales team. When the proper greeting is utilized, the disconnect or "Just Looking" rate plummets.

Each little change at the release has a big effect.

A pitcher's precedent metrics might include his percentage of early releases. If the pitcher releases the ball too early 45 percent of the time, the ball will often miss the plate. Lower the precedent early release metric of 45 percent to say... 25 percent and the ball will hit the strike zone more often and the STRIKE COUNT WILL RISE! Notice I said "Will rise" not "Might rise, could rise or should rise." This IMPROVEMENT is based on the law of cause and effect.

Think... precedent equals skill and dependent equals results.

Coaches, therefore, need to coach precedent skills in order to change dependent results.

Just like there is real science in pitching, there is real science in selling. In sales, precedent metrics are the identification and quantification of performance of the key skills in a selling system. If these precedent steps are performed well by a person they will see an increase in their dependent performance metrics such as; sales volume, average sale, close percent etc.. The secret to coaching is to track, measure and coach precedent skills.

CONSIDER THE GREETING

Let's consider the greeting as the first sale a salesperson must make. If

successful, salespeople sell themselves and stay with the customer. Imagine you have a salesperson who has a high customer disconnect rate at the door. This salesperson gets released by using the phrase "Just Looking" a high percentage of the time. In order to help her, the coach should observe how the salesperson is greeting customers. Then she can be taught to avoid greetings that elicit the automatic customer response of "Just Looking". Most salespeople greet a customer by saying something like, "Can I help you?" These or similar greetings will create a high disconnect rate.

In this greeting example, the precedent skill can be measured simply as a behavior or skill that did or did not happen. How the salesperson greets will change the dependent metric which is the disconnect or "Just Looking" rate. So, here is a takeaway for you and your sales team... let's change the greeting to "What brings you in today?" This greeting phrase will cut the disconnect rate by 40-50% or more. The precedent skill is using the correct greeting. The law of cause and effect states that they will LOWER their disconnect rate by making this simple adjustment.

Ah Ha MOMENT: Therefore, an improvement in a precedent skill metric WILL improve the dependent met-

ric, in this example the "Just looking" disconnect rate. And, when trained properly, the other dependent metrics such as sales volume, average sales, etc., will also increase.

THE 4TH LEG... COACH

Ah Ha MOMENT TWO: Your job of coaching is made impossible if you do not have a sales training or selling system. The system defines skills or steps in your selling process. The system is the precedent behavior or skill that obtains the desired dependent end result. If you have no sales training system in place, you will be left floundering and unable to affect real performance improvement.

Coaching is comprised of three things. Observing the salesperson, reviewing dependent and precedent performance metrics and teaching the skills and rationale behind each skill.

Coaching is made easy when there is an effective selling system and there is sound precedent and dependent performance tracking.

In the "Just looking" example above, the sales coach simply coached TWO THINGS. First, the coach taught the salesperson a different greeting. Second, the salesperson was taught the rationale behind changing that greeting. Just like the pitching coach coaches the ball release point and the rationale behind that release point.



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"Duh coach...I know my stats... how do I decrease my balls and increase my strikes?...just tell me what to do coach!"

Your job as a coach is to get the pitcher to understand that changes in the release point will help to improve the ball's trajectory.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Reference the chart showing actual

sales results achieved at retail by utilization of the proper greeting discussed in the example. The dependent metric is the disconnect or "Just Looking" percent. The precedent metric is the percentage of utilization of the proper greeting.

It shows a 60-day view; 30-days prior and 30-days after teaching the appropriate greeting to the sales team. When the proper greeting is utilized, the disconnect or "Just Looking" rate plummets.

In summary, a poor coach "yells and tells" the salesperson to improve his or her greeting disconnect rate. This inappropriate coaching is focused on the dependent metric, the disconnect rate.

A good coach observes how the salesperson greets customers and then asks him or her to use a more effective greeting. This good coach is

focused on the precedent metric, the proper greeting percent, the cause.

Offer: Furniture World readers can sign up to take a free Sales Manager Effectiveness Quiz and receive an in depth report showing opportunities for improvement or validating the fact you are doing it right.

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About Hal McClamma: *Founder of Integrity Business Coaching, Hal McClamma has over 30-years in the home furnishings, appliance and electronics industry. He has owned successful full line furniture stores and sleep shops. McClamma has also been a successful award winning distribution center manager, single & multiple store manager and company Vice President for Havertys Furniture, Barrow Furniture, Maas Brothers, Burdines & Jordan Marsh.*

Hal has taught his business, sales and leadership concepts to stores with annual revenues from under \$1 million to well over \$500 million in 38 states and overseas.

He is the author of the Engineered Success Leadership Program used by corporate America inside and outside of the furniture industry.

Questions about this article, related topics or to get more information on the sales manager quiz, email Hal at Hal@IntegrityBusinessCoaching.com or call 334.470.9999.


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90 SECONDS TO \$UCCESS SERIES

Eleven thought-provoking leadership precepts that ensure success.

by Ray Morefield, *Common Goals*

The homonyms Insure and Ensure have similar pronunciations but different meanings. According to Webster, Ensure refers to making sure or certain, or to protect. Insure alludes to a contractual relationship to be remunerated for a legitimate claim or to pay monies to protect against loss or damage. Both have meaningful purpose in managing the administrative and financial affairs of retail furniture organizations.

"Good leaders ensure their associates understand that positive attitudes are more important than facts."

This 90 Seconds To Success Series installment will list eleven progressive and thought-provoking leadership precepts that "Ensure" retail organizations retain positive attitudes and achieve continuous improvement.

I urge Furniture World readers who have an interest in "Insuring" retail organizations against loss and damage to reference Stephen J. Wisocky's excellent "Risky Business" series for a complete discussion. Past articles in

Furniture World's "Risky Business" series can be seen at furninfo.com/Series/RiskyBusiness.

WHAT GOOD LEADERS ENSURE

1. Good retail leaders ensure that although personnel are not delineated on a balance sheet, they are a company's most valuable asset.

2. They ensure that ethics are never subordinated or compromised to effectuate revenues. When credibility is lost in one area, it is frequently lost in all areas.

3. They ensure that staff members know and understand how to respond and articulate corporate strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities whether they are selling, buying, merchandising, advertising or delivering products.

4. They ensure that they regularly review working capital ratios and trends. Waiting to review financial results until year's end is a formula that invites failure.

5. They ensure that they plan properly. When leaders fail to plan and are guilty of managing by procrastination circumstances frequently

dictate decisions.

6. Good leaders ensure that they understand and respond to changing market trends before rather than after competition has "seized the moment". The first into a market regularly gains and retains market share.

7. They ensure that they match skills and passion to each specific job. Every associate desires advancement, if not in responsibility, at least in compensation. Promotion based on longevity has merit but results based on performance and skills that are specified in job descriptions produce superior rewards in leadership and performance.

8. Good leaders ensure their associates understand that positive attitudes are more important than facts. Facts change. New opportunities present themselves with regularity if we consider each event as a stepping stone rather than a stumbling

"When credibility is lost in one area, it is frequently lost in all areas."

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"Good leaders ensure

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block.

William James said: "The greatest discovery of any generation is that a human can alter his life by altering his attitude."

9. They ensure that objective fact finding has greater managerial merit than blame-placing when remediation of policies and action are required.

10. They ensure that immediate supervisors understand that loyalty to the organization by associates increases in proportion to the loyalty that supervisor's extend to them.

11. They ensure that they take the time to review and codify the company mission statement.

Mission statements have merit but frequently are not maximized as a

management tool. Regular review by motivating managers ensures that effective mission statements accomplish the following:

- The corporate vision should be defined in a way so that all associates understand their involvement in achieving the stated mission.
- Authors of the statement should understand that until and unless specific purpose is defined and measured, mission statements and management policies lack merit and meaning.
- Leadership should realize that reviewing mission statements and reporting results regularly encourages employee participation and enthusiasm.

CONCLUSION

Judiciously Insuring corporate assets and assuring that best business practices are Ensured, postures most enterprises for secure employment, positive growth and profitable futures.

About Ray Morefield: Ray Morefield has been affiliated with leading corporations in the furniture, housewares, hardware and coatings industries. He has also served other industries in an advisory capacity through his company Common Goals, Inc. Questions on any management topic, can be directed to him at editor@furninfo.com. See more of his articles for Furniture World Magazine on the furninfo.com website at www.furninfo.com.





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I was just amazed at the talent of people running this close out store operation. It was fun for the people and we closed it out and it was a broom swept building at the end of the day.

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Tom Hendrix
President, Henco Furniture



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DROPPED CALLS

Are you losing sales to competitors who offer a better mobile experience? Find out if your website measures up.

by Jay Bojan

It is a fact that well over 50% of the active shoppers in the US constantly use their smartphones to search, research and buy while on the move. This number is increasing rapidly as more sophisticated phones, lighter tablets and faster networks proliferate the marketplace. Having a desktop-only website along with ads in local newspapers will not reach this emerging group of digital consumers. It is critical that you build a robust mobile marketing strategy which will enhance your brand message and drive more business through your door.

You've seen customers walking around your store with their phones. They are researching your competitors

and making sure they are getting the best deal. Smartphones empower users to find the information they want, when they want it.

If you don't have a mobile presence equal to or better than your competitors' sites, potential customers may choose not to visit your store first. However, if they do visit your competition first, and while there find your easy to use and compelling mobile website, they may well decide to pay you a visit. Industry statistics indicate that over 70% of mobile users skip to the next site after a poor mobile website experience (Source: Nielsen 2012) and smartphone shoppers want more mobile-optimized product information while they're shopping in

stores. (Source: Moosylvania, 2013)

GET 'EM IN THE DOOR

How do you get consumers into your store in the first place? Traditional advertising channels such as print, TV and radio have suffered double digit declines. Digital ads tied to social media campaigns optimized for the mobile consumer are successfully taking up the slack. Not only are these ads more cost effective than traditional channels but they are a mobile user's preferred method of engaging with your brand.

This article will give you real, actionable tactics to address this massive mobile marketing opportunity.

"A good mobile experience must be finger friendly with big buttons to tap and swipe versus using a mouse and full keyboard."



Desktop version for Bob Mills Furniture is shown at left along with the mobile version that has fewer, larger buttons, less text and fewer choices.

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"If customers visit your competition first, and while there find your easy to use and compelling mobile website, they may well decide to pay you a visit."

GOING MOBILE.

Two approaches have emerged over the last 18 months as best practices in establishing a mobile presence. The best approach for you depends on the products and or services you offer.

But, before we discuss your options it's important to understand how mobile users are different than Desktop or Tablet users. Their needs, motivations and behavior are unique, and your solution needs to mirror this.

Mobile Users are looking for very specific features:

- **Action oriented experiences:** Get to the point. Mobile users generally don't like to read lots of detail. They are impatient, hungry, shopping or on some mission that needs quenching.
- **Fast results:** The site has to load in under 7 seconds or three quarters of consumers are off to your competitor.
- **Easy to follow Graphical interfaces:** Creating a compelling and engaging experience pays off

because its cool, and mobile users don't like to read or type. +80% of shoppers use phones versus tablets due to the convenience factor (Nielsen 3/12).

- **Location services:** Step by step directions with maps and Click to Call are very valuable.
- **Easy Signup:** Whether it's email or social media, it needs to be push button simple.
- **Finger friendly:** Use buttons to tap and swipe versus using a mouse or full keyboard.

To fully meet the needs of the mobile consumer, sites must be designed to incorporate all these features, which are less important to the desktop or tablet user. Content, context and engaging experiences are critical to capture their attention and business.

It's shocking, but in my personal experience, many owners or senior managers haven't looked at their website from their phones, while 50% or more of their customers do! We all

know the benefits of being a secret shopper. Try going to your phone, call up your website in the internet browser to see your mobile presence first hand. If you see a desktop site on a small screen then you're not meeting the needs of today's consumer and chances are you are losing sales to your competition. Check them out on your phone too and then read on.

The images that accompany this article represent a sequential mobile experience that meets the needs of a mobile user shopping for furniture. Here the shopper touches graphics and is lead down a series of logical questions until a product matching his or her answers is recommended.

The selection process simultaneously fills out a form as the user selects graphics. The form is then emailed to the customer service department to address next steps such as setting up a design appointment with or contacting the consumer to complete a sale. We have used this approach from cosmetics to auto-glass and find it to be very engaging. You simply don't find these experiences on desktops.

Mattress selector gives mobile viewers product categories to choose without typing. As potential customers touch the graphics, the system focuses on the appropriate mattress choices/ vendors.





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Bojan's Furniture & Outdoor Living is a mock up of a mobile site that includes a host of mobile optimized features that you will want to consider. Graphics load quickly along with text, pricing, and buy-now content that feeds from an existing POS/ inventory management/ eCommerce software system provider. The site provides single button access to advertised specials, new item listings, the ability to browse furniture, step by step directions, social media and coupons.

TECHNOLOGY CHOICES

As referenced earlier, there are two industry approaches to mobilize your website:

Mobile Optimized Sites: Build a sep-

arate Mobile Optimized version of your desktop site.

Responsive Web Design: Rebuild your entire website using technology that responds to each device's screen resolution.

MOBILE OPTIMIZED SITES

A separate Mobile optimized site can be very effective when designed and built to specifically meet the needs of the mobile consumer. These are consumers who have elected to

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Responsive Site: Desktop-Tablet- Phone



Above is an example of a responsive site (all rights are that of the site owner). At left is the Desktop Site with full layout. When the screen size is reduced, note that the header image adapts to fit, and information boxes are shuffled. The content is not missing, just redeployed. When made the width of a phone at right, the information boxes collapse to fit the screen.

follow your brand, as well as new potential consumers who will find you on the web. As stated previously, well over 50% of the active shoppers in the US constantly use their smartphones to search, research and buy while on the move. This number is increasing rapidly as more sophisticated phones, lighter tablets and faster networks proliferate in the marketplace. Having a desktop-only website along with ads in local newspapers will not reach this emerging group of digital consumers. It is critical that you build a robust mobile marketing strategy to build your brand and drive more business.

In developing such a site, the first step is to find an experienced mobile web provider who understands:

- The buying process for your products.
- What is the effectiveness of mCommerce.
- What your short and long term objectives are for mobile marketing.
- How customers find you today.

- What they expect of your brand.
- The mediums and resources available.
- What your competition is doing.
- The key value of your brand.

The mobile web designer should lay out an experience to meet the needs of your brand, your mobile users and help drive more business.

On page 24 is a site design focused on providing actionable data to get customers to visit a store because most consumers want to size, sit upon, touch and envision the furniture in their homes. Actionable data in this context is single button access to advertised specials, new item listings, the ability to browse furniture, step by step directions, social media integration and coupons. An interesting fact is that redemption rates for mobile coupons are 10 times higher than traditional rates at approximately 20%. (Borrell Associates 2011)

It is important to note that much of the content in this design is fully

dynamic. For this example, the content is from direct feeds (automatic streaming data) from a central computing ERP system so that changes on the desktop site are fully reflected in the mobile site automatically.

Once the mobile site is complete, a simple rule is added to your desktop website that recognizes when a mobile device is attempting to reach you. When this happens, the mobile user will see only the mobile version of the site without having to type in a different web address. It's a completely seamless and automated process.

CONSIDERATIONS

If you are happy with your current desktop website, then consider a Mobile Optimized site which can be implemented rapidly and at low cost. The focus of this site is to speak to the mobile consumer which often includes experiences not found on the desktop. A separate site, done right, should not present a maintenance problem. Plus it can be tightly integrated into your back-end systems and feed content

"An App?"

if not already downloaded, Apps are inconvenient to a large percentage of shoppers. Apps have thier place and can be extremely useful, but 94% of users prefer the web... search, select and go!"

from an existing eCommerce or ERP system enabling automatic content synchronization.

RESPONSIVE WEB DESIGN

Responsive Web Design (RWD) has emerged over the last 6 or 8 months as an approach for businesses that are ready and able to redesign their entire web experiences to take advantage of mobile. Often this includes scrapping an existing desktop site design so new programming techniques can be used.

RWD is already proving to be a great technology that promises to address every consumer screen size with a single website. This includes desktops, phones, tablets, TV and any other devices. The system is built to detect the screen size of the device accessing the website. Delivered content is then automatically reconfigured to fit the screen. For illustrative purposes an example of a Responsive site is shown on page 24 (all rights are that of the site owner).

The appeal for RWD is clear. You only need to build a single website with a single code base to support any and all devices. This is an IT Manager's dream, but there are downsides. The main disadvantage is that since you are effectively building your entire web experience from scratch, you will incur additional costs and time before you can take your business mobile.

To build a website using RWD, you typically begin by redesigning your

desktop website to conform to the special rules that RWD demands. Your website will need to break down into components in a column type structure that will resize and reposition elegantly based on the screen size.

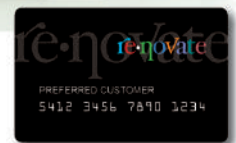
Notice that the illustrated site has a certain structure to it which is common to RWD. It contains a header with a

menu, main image across the top of the page with end to end borders coordinating with a body of text beneath, and then multiple, but segmented topics in boxes or containers. This is a well laid out site with clever styling to create a good experience for the user of multiple devices.

Today the big picture is, RWD is



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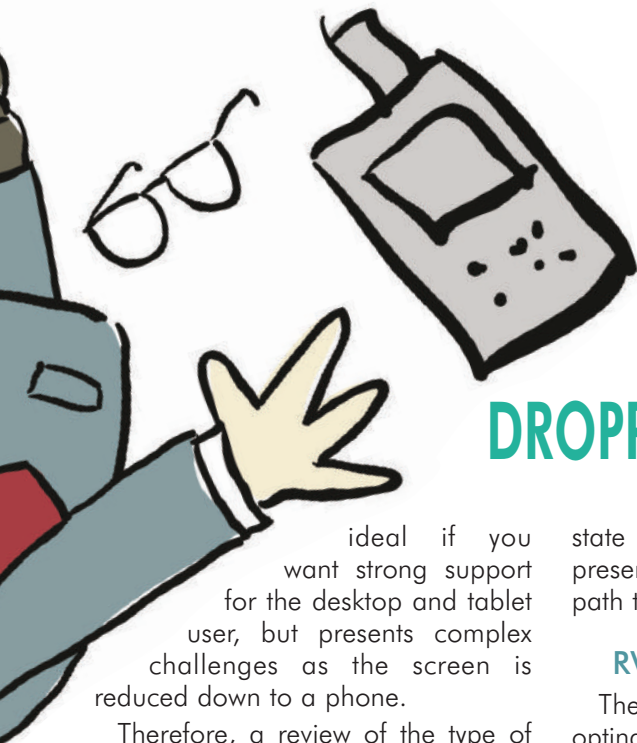


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DROPPED CALLS

ideal if you want strong support for the desktop and tablet user, but presents complex challenges as the screen is reduced down to a phone.

Therefore, a review of the type of product, services and/or experiences required to maximize engagement is required. There are some industries where the decision to go RWD is simple. For example, the law site shown on the previous page is a good fit for RWD because users go there to read-up on the latest info and generally do not need to interact.

To be clear, RWD is maturing at a rapid pace, and as with many technologies what is difficult today will be an easy standard tomorrow. Again, take a look at your needs and the

state of your current desktop web presence. That will help clarify your path to adapt the right technology.

RWD CONSIDERATIONS

The primary considerations when opting for RWD as opposed to a dedicated mobile experience are:

- *RWD downloads and reformats the desktop site to conform to the screen size. This could well mean downloading a full desktop worth of content to a mobile device. Therefore, you must pay attention to what is actually getting downloaded to the mobile device. If your desktop site is graphic or video intensive it may take much longer than the 7 seconds a mobile user is willing to wait. As a general rule, a proper mobile optimized site will be about 15% of the size of a desktop site so it can load extremely quickly.*
- *RWD is inherently a "jack of all trades" approach. It is easy to spend time designing for the device without thinking through the mobile user experience. What works on a desktop does not always work on the mobile device. RWD will rarely reduce large bodies of text. Often, RWD simply reformats text to fit the smaller screen. Mobile users end up having to scroll through all this text to find something useful.*

SUMMARY

As with all marketing initiatives, the objective is to optimize the results of any investment by reaching more targeted prospects and turning them into

customers. Make sure your prospects can find you. This takes a solid mobile presence and requires that you match the mobile experience to how your consumer prefers to engage with your brand and consume your products/services.

If this community of mobile users is lost to you, act to capture them by creating an experience that will engage them.

Your choice is simple. Either build a dedicated mobile site that presents experiences not found on your desktop site but relevant to your products and services, or rebuild your entire web experience from scratch and tweak it for the Mobile user. In either case, make sure you are dealing with a seasoned mobile designer who understands what makes mobile users respond.

About Jay Bojan: Jay Bojan is an entrepreneur and CEO of Wapple US. He and his business partner, Darrell Knight have been in mobile for over 13 years and founded a Cloud based company way back in 2001, when clouds were more weather oriented than they are today.

Wapple has been developing mobile solutions for over 10 years for brands such as Microsoft , P&G , Covergirl, Pantene, American Furniture Warehouse, Bob Mills Furniture, Olay and more. Today Wapple continues practicing mobile first excellence and offers Responsive Web Technology solutions.

Questions about this article can be directed to Jay at 719-330-9697 or jay.bojan@wapple.us.

"Your choice is simple. Either build a mobile site that presents experiences not found on your desktop site but relevant to your products and services, or rebuild your entire web experience from scratch and tweak it for the Mobile user."



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NEW TRUCKING REGS

Reduce the impact of new driver rules on costs and delivery delays.

by Dan Bolger

Many retailers are unaware that New Hours of Service Regulations enacted on July 1, 2013 will result in higher costs and possible delivery delays. Also, you run your own trucks, your company and/or your drivers are legally responsible for compliance. If your drivers don't get enough time off between shifts, drive more than 11 hours straight or exceed 14 hours on-duty time, penalties are substantial. Here we will summarize the new regulations, suggest ways to minimize costs and to possibly even to improve your methods in receiving and delivery.

After 14 years of ongoing battles, the new Hours of Service regulations cover all operators of commercial

vehicles with gross vehicle weight (GVR) in excess of 10,000 pounds. While these regulations hail from the U.S. Transportation Department, most state laws automatically follow the federal rules for intrastate operations. This article applies to general trucking and excludes passenger buses, oil field operations, agriculture, delays due to weather, hazardous materials, emergencies, etc. All operators of trucks are included whether they require a general license (non-CDL) for commercial vehicles from 10,001 to 26,000 pounds or a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) for heavier vehicles.

Proponents of the regulations claimed the regulations requiring more driver rest will increase safety

while industry opponents said the rules would add cost without improving highway safety. Final closure came when a three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals in Washington made a final decision... for now. FTR Associates, a leading trucking industry forecaster estimates that the new regulations will increase annual trucking costs by 3% or 18 billion dollars in a public document available at <http://bit.ly/1dqbOSM>.

SHORT & LONG HAUL

There are two types of operations, Short Haul Operations and Long Haul Operations. Short haul drivers operate from one point and come back daily. Short Haul operations are defined as 100 nautical miles (115.1

"Set aside an express receiving dock for carriers who are delivering just a few pieces. Ultimately any costs associated with delays will become your costs."

Inbound dropped trailer.





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COSTS & DELIVERY DELAYS



At left is inbound waiting for delivery, prepped and staged. All merchandise should be fully prepped and staged to avoid delivery delays.



miles) for vehicles requiring a Commercial Driver's License or 150 nautical miles (172.6 miles) for vehicles that do not require CDL licensed drivers. The new regulations specify that before starting work, drivers must

have been off duty for ten hours. In the next 14 hours they may drive a total of 11 hours, followed by 10 off-duty hours. They may drive a total of 60 hours in seven days or 70 hours in eight days. If they reach the limit, they

"Concentrating your business with a limited number of carriers offers cost, damage prevention, and improved advance information."

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must have 34 hours off-duty which includes two time periods from 1 AM to 5 AM. This is a major increase from the previous law, and is commonly referred to as the 34-hour restart. Log books are not required, but records in prescribed format must be maintained for six months. Long Haul operations also require a 30 minute break within the first 8 hours and require log books which are increasingly being replaced with electronic logging.

These regulations are important to keep in mind. You should also be aware that if a carrier is delayed for any reason at any stop prior to yours, it will affect you, as well as other retailers receiving goods after you. Ultimately any costs associated with delays will become your costs, whether they manifest in your rates or in detention charges. So, it is in everyone's best interests to keep the trucks moving. Here are some ideas to consider on the inbound side to help your carriers meet the regulations.

Minimize delay time for inbound trucks while checking in, getting to the dock and unloading. Ask yourself these three questions.

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Hours-of-Service (HOS) Regulations

Source: <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/>

11-Hour Driving Limit: May drive a maximum of 11 hours after 10 consecutive hours off duty.

14-Hour Limit: May not drive beyond the 14th consecutive hour after coming on duty, following 10 consecutive hours off duty. Off-duty time does not extend the 14-hour period.

Rest Breaks: May drive only if 8 hours or less have passed since end of driver's last off-duty or sleeper-berth period of at least 30 minutes. [49 CFR 397.5 mandatory "in attendance" time may be included in break if no other duties performed] Not applicable to Short Haul Drivers.

60/70-Hour Limit: May not drive after 60/70 hours on duty in 7/8 consecutive days. A driver may restart a 7/8 consecutive day period after taking 34 or more consecutive hours off duty. Must include two periods from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. home terminal time, and may only be used once per week, or 168 hours, measured from the beginning of the previous restart.

Sleeper Berth Provision: Drivers using the sleeper berth provision must take at least 8 consecutive hours in the sleeper berth, plus a separate 2 consecutive hours either in the sleeper berth, off duty, or any combination of the two.

- *Is the necessary information and equipment available to start unloading?*
- *Do you have enough receiving help?*
- *Are there delays in reconciliation due to your internal processes?*

Set aside an express receiving dock for carriers who are delivering just a few pieces. Rather than waiting in line, these carriers can back into the express dock and move the goods to the rear for quick check-in and departure.

Consignee unloading. In this case the carrier puts the trailer in the dock and departs, coming back to pick up the empty. You get a better rate and the carrier achieves higher equipment or driver utilization. If you have truck parking space on your lot or nearby, the driver may appreciate being able to go off duty and take a rest break.

Consolidation: Concentrating your business with a limited number of carriers offers cost, damage prevention, and improved advance information.

With a maximum legal on-duty time of 14 hours and maximum driving

time of 11 hours, minimizing non-productive time for your delivery crews is also essential.

Be Prepared: All merchandise should be fully prepped and staged for delivery. Time after time I see crews wandering around looking for merchandise or doing additional prep that delays truck departures.

Final Check: All the merchandise needed to complete the delivery should be verified. Are tools or additional parts such as bed frames and bolts loaded? This eliminates surprises and customer grievances upon delivery.

Plan Ahead: Even though your customers have likely been advised of their delivery window or appointment, a call ahead from the DC confirming the appointment or a call 30-45 minutes before the anticipated arrival can improve turnaround time.

Management Oversight: Make sure everybody does their job. Check and double check.

In closing, I'm reminded that taking a fresh look at every process offers

opportunities to improve and gain competitive advantage with terrific customer satisfaction. Remember the question "How do you eat an elephant?" "You eat an elephant bite by bite!"

More Important Information: It's important for companies running trucks to know that on-duty time is all inclusive. For a more technical description visit the US Department of Transportation Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration page that describes exactly what on-duty time includes at <http://1.usa.gov/13Ridzn>.

About Dan Bolger: Contributing editor Dan Bolger of *The Bolger Group* helps companies achieve improved transportation, warehousing and logistics. Contact Dan Bolger care of *Furniture World Magazine* at dbolger@furninfo.com or call him direct at 740-503-8875. For more information on transportation, logistics and furniture warehousing topics, go to *Furniture World Magazine's* website at <http://www.furninfo.com/Authors/DanBolger/2> to read all of Dan's operations articles.

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<http://1.usa.gov/OukHfy>



How to light up your latent powers to market home furnishings.

by Larry Mullins

I had no idea that my entire life would change when I walked into a little barber shop in Mount Rainer, Maryland and met Don the Barber. When I strolled in I was an 18-year old high school graduate with a foggy, undefined future. I was working in a lumber yard. When I left Don's shop I carried the secret of destiny with me.

I didn't know it, but the book I had in hand would teach me the one thing most people fail to do when they are in a desperate situation: It would teach me that it was possible to think my way out of any situation, no matter how dire. Not that I would learn this lesson quickly. To learn to think takes a lifetime of effort. And just when you imagine you know how to think, you realize that you have barely scratched the surface. What this book convinced me is that it is possible to learn to think creatively. And simply believing in the possibilities of a new way to live radically altered my future.

In this article I will explain what I learned, and tell you how to apply creative techniques to sell more home furnishings. It will be possible to do this because I have seen these creative principles applied by some of the great furniture entrepreneurs. My first furniture job was working for Charles Curtis of Curtis Bros. Furniture in Washington, D.C. At the time, Curtis

Bros. was the largest furniture store under one roof in America. Charles achieved the first single location million-dollar month in furniture history. After that I worked for Clyde Bedell, the great advertising genius. There followed tours of duty for Leon Levitz, and then John F. Lawhon. Each of these men had a vital piece of the puzzle. Each was creative in a unique, pragmatic way. And each of them made a lot of money. Yet times have changed. Now additional creative techniques are necessary to achieve success in marketing home furnishings. I will explain. But first, let's return to the gift of Don the Barber.

I AM LENT A WEIRD BOOK

Don chatted away about strange things as he cut my hair. He talked about the destiny of humankind, and asked me what my own role would be in shaping it. I was completely puzzled by the subject. At the time I was hoping to get a job with the telephone company so I could make a reasonable wage and have some job security. That was the extent of my aspirations. But he brushed this aside and urged me to dare to a dream of "a triumphant human life." This was confusing to me, but it was kind of fun to talk with Don.

And when I paid him for the haircut, he handed me a book. Don expressed his desire that I would read it. When I looked at the cover, I was really baffled: "Raja Yoga, or Mental Development." I looked into his eyes hopefully.

"Don, you don't believe all this stuff



"Don chatted away about strange things as he cut my hair. He talked about the destiny of humankind, and asked me what my own role would be in shaping it."

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do you?"

Don smiled and replied: "Oh, I'm not asking you to believe anything. A book is like a cafeteria. If you see something you like, take it. If what you see does not appeal to you, pass it by for now. You may change your mind and go back for it later."

Later, in my room, I read by an open window.

"We are perhaps unaccustomed to the idea of mastery over our own inner thoughts and feelings... It should be as easy to expel an obnoxious thought from your mind as it is to shake a stone out of your shoe; and until you can do that it is useless to talk about ascendancy over Nature, and the rest of it ...

"Yet the weary and careworn faces that we meet by the thousands, even among the affluent classes of civilization, testify too clearly how seldom this mastery is obtained."

I read and read. When I looked up, daylight was fading. I looked around at the poverty of my surroundings. But now I believed something I never even considered before. There is another way to live. My education had begun.

no days with evening hours and making Saturday the only day to shop the store's selection as a couple, these entrepreneurs train prospective customers to choose one of the big boxes instead. All big boxes have convenient store hours. Hours are not a cure-all, but they are becoming increasingly important. Next, I check the store's website. Websites are the most grievously ignored opportunity for the independent. Even large independents rarely look at their websites on a regular basis. Are they posting their current ads? Are their websites up to par with the latest goings on? Even grandpa uses the internet to get shopping information these days.

If struggling stores want to attract more traffic, convenient hours and vibrant websites are two simple tactics that cost very little but could set into motion a game changing attitude. Change is inevitable, and never has it been so virulent as in recent years in the furniture industry. The good news is that smart independent retailers who are willing to adapt to change can flourish. There are so many tactical things an independent can do that big boxes cannot. But before you can employ killer tactics with maximum effectiveness you must first have a creative, strategic game plan. The New York Giants would never enter into a football game against the New England Patriots with a bunch of good

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WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH FURNITURE SALES?

Actually, creative Thinking (with a capital T) can save the struggling independent furniture entrepreneur. I receive many calls from desperate store owners claiming that big box stores are ruining their businesses. I first ask whether they have family-friendly store hours. Almost always they disclose store hours that make it difficult for a couple to shop the store together. So (in most cases), by having

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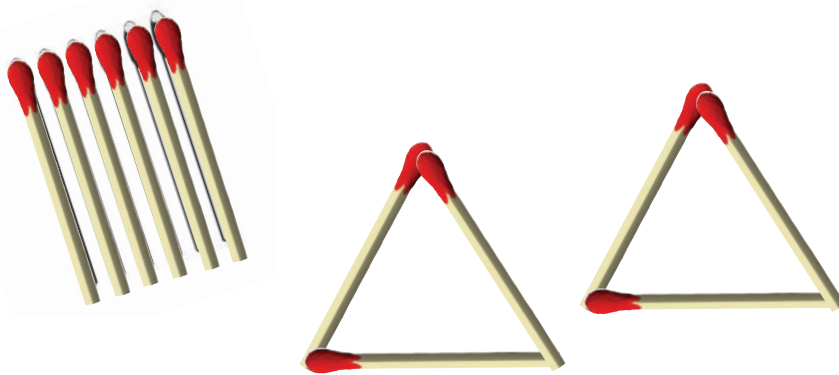
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"If I gave you six matches
and challenged you to arrange them to make two triangles, you would have no difficulty. But if I challenged you to arrange them to make four triangles, you would certainly have much more difficulty."

plays but no strategic game plan.

What I learned from "Raja Yoga" was the need to think strategically. Charles Curtis and each of the other great furniture men I worked for had this capacity to think creatively and strategically. They sold furniture and they made money. They were not perfect, in fact they made mistakes. I watched a couple of them rise to the top of the industry and then slowly fade away. What was the missing ingredient each seemed to lack? It was something they had in abundance at one time, but they somehow lost along the way. Empathy. Not just empathy for their customers, empathy for their associates and vendors.

Consider the independent who set his store hours in place over twenty years ago. That was before so many families were headed by two working adults. It was before people were so busy and had so little free time. It was before the big boxes offered evening and Sunday hours. Modern shoppers do not want to arrange their schedules to shop at the convenience of the furniture store owner. Wise entrepreneurs consider it their strategic mission to strive to improve the lives of their customers. This requires a special degree of empathy for the demanding schedules of today's families.

But all of this aside, I promised you some pragmatic creative techniques that you can use to sell more home furnishings. Here are three of the best I know.

THE THREE KEY CREATIVE STRATEGIES

1 Time Blocking: How to set aside nine forty-hour weeks dedicated to strategic planning. For the average under-performing entrepreneur, learning ends after formal education stops. This will not do if you want to achieve retailing excellence. An investment of an hour a day toward new strategies and skills will give you an important competitive edge.

Why? Because the odds are good that not a single one of your competitors will make this commitment. One hour each day equals over nine forty-hour weeks a year. In five years, you will have accumulated forty-five work-weeks of research and study. What kind of progress do you imagine you could make if you invested forty-five work-weeks of research and study over the five-year period? Because almost no one does this, you can look forward to some degree of proficiency in a year. In three years, you should be outstanding in your field. In five years,

you will have spent over forty-five weeks of effort toward your goals. With any luck at all, you will be world-class. But if an hour a day is out of the question, even one hour a week of undistracted time to think will yield big improvements and greater success.

2 Leveraging with Synergy: How to make one plus one equal four. Seem impossible? The secret of leveraging your resources is born of the understanding of synergy. Many years ago, a man named Buckminster Fuller said that when you combine certain ingredients the result cannot be predicted. For example, when you combine two volatile gases, oxygen and hydrogen, you get water, a liquid that puts fires out!

If I gave you six matches and challenged you to arrange them to make two triangles, you would have no difficulty. But if I challenged you to arrange them to make four triangles, you would certainly have much more difficulty. To most people the challenge would appear impossible. "There just aren't enough matches," they might complain.

However, if we could change a person's attitude toward the problem, and get him or her to consider the possibilities rather than just the obstacles and limitations, a solution could



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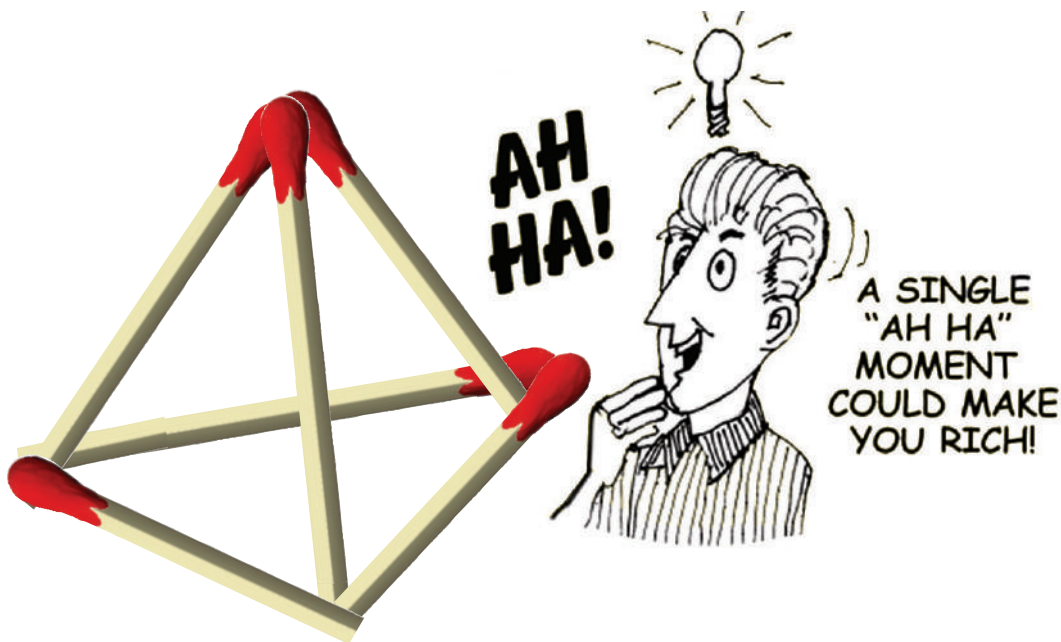
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emerge. What changed?

Attitude was the only change. First, the mental attitude. When you expand your own vision, when you approach a problem with the belief that a solution is possible, new possibilities become obvious.

Attitude also has another meaning. It also means the position of an object in relation to other things – its relationship to other things. To solve the problem, we had to change the relationship of the matches to one another. I believe you can see the correlation between this puzzle and making the most of your resources.

3. The "Secret" Formula for .Unlocking Your Creativity. The formula I am about to show you was featured in the "Raja Yoga" book that was originally published in 1906. More recently a big time advertising expert claimed it for his own. He wrote that the reason he was willing to reveal this "secret" was because he knew no one would use it, it is so unique. But he also claimed the formula was the key to his success.

Like most secrets, this one has been lying around in plain sight for a long, long time. However, I use it constantly. I have no idea how the formula works, I only know it does. It has five simple steps.

STEP ONE is to cram your mind with all the factual information about the issue you can.

"An investment of an hour a day toward new strategies and skills will give you an important competitive edge."

STEP TWO is to consciously "drop" everything into your super-conscious mind. Command the mind to work out a solution. This incubation period is crucial. Resist the temptation to "open the oven door" to see how things are going. Just forget the issue and do other things. Before you know it the buzzer will go off.

STEP THREE is the "Ah Ha" moment. The solution emerges.

STEP FOUR is the action step. No decision is complete until it is acted out.

STEP FIVE is to evaluate the results. Adjust, and recycle.

I have only scratched the surface of the creative tactics that you can employ to be more productive and successful. Remember that you have under-used or unused resources that the big box corporate competition cannot employ. They are locked into item-price presentations that all look just about the same. Don't try to copy them, don't compete in their bloody

shark tank. Rather, create a "Blue Ocean" domain of your own. People are silently begging for an empathetic furniture retailer in your market who can be trusted. That's you. You have virtually unlimited possibilities to establish yourself as the preeminent retailer in your market.

Questions on this article? Call Larry directly for a free consultation at 904.794.9212, or contact him at larry@larrymullins.com. Larry Mullins is Marketing Feature Editor for Furniture World and has 35+ years' experience on the front lines of furniture marketing. Larry's mainstream executive experience, his creative work with promotion specialists, and mastery of advertising principles have established him as one of the foremost experts in furniture marketing. His turnkey High-Impact programs produce legendary results for everything from cash raising events to profitable exit strategies. His newest book is *THE METAVALUES BREAKTHROUGH*. Larry is founder and CEO of UltraSales, Inc. See more articles by Larry at www.furnitureinfo.com or www.ultrasales.com.

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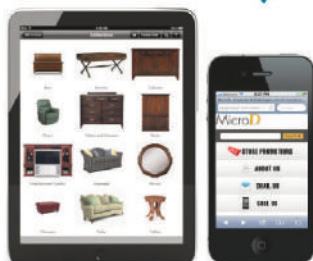
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PINEAPPLE HOSPITALITY

A three-step process to explain and train your way to a comfortable and hospitable customer buying experience.

Rene' Johnston-Gingrich

Much of what we see in art and architecture is symbolic. We see the use of certain colors and symbols to express a feeling, establish presence, or make a statement. These same messages can be seen in furniture design, especially traditional furniture. In studying the meaning of certain pieces of art or architecture, and even furniture detail, there is much we can learn. In this article, I would like to discuss some of the lessons in customer care we can learn from one specific design motif.

The pineapple is one of the most recognizable motifs in furniture design and a widely recognized symbol of hospitality and the symbolic design I

want to discuss. The work itself is iconic, but what I would like to suggest is that we look to the meaning behind this design and discuss what it can teach us about how we treat our customers and how we can provide them with the best possible service. First, a little history.

It is believed that American colonists began importing pineapples from the Caribbean in the 17th century. Because of this fruit's exotic qualities and rareness, the pineapple soon became a symbol of hospitality in early America. The trade routes between America and Caribbean islands were often dangerous and slow, making the fruit a rare commodity. Typically, only the very wealthy had access to this del-

icacy.

During this time, much pomp and circumstance surrounded the featuring of a pineapple in beautiful displays designed to impress guests. It is even rumored that the fruit could be rented to use in a display for a gathering or event and later returned or sold to someone else. If guests were offered this fruit, it was considered a very special treat.

There are also many stories of New England sea captains who, upon returning from trade routes in the Caribbean or Pacific, would place a pineapple outside their homes to symbolize their safe return.

Since that time, this symbol of hospitality has been used in a variety of

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"Customers are heading into our stores with visions of holiday gatherings. We want to make sure our store is merchandised in a way that will allow us to capitalize on the opportunity to meet those needs."

different ways. The pineapple symbol was used frequently in the 18th and 19th centuries to decorate furnishings as well as accessories associated with entertaining.

Today we continue to see carved pineapples incorporated into architecture and commonly used as decorative elements on furnishings. We often see them used as lamp finials, atop four-poster beds and the pineapple image on fabrics and prints. I would argue however, that displaying this symbol of hospitality is not the same as displaying the actions and behaviors that truly define hospitality.

In all customer interactions, being hospitable plays a crucial role. It is your responsibility as a business owner or manager to make sure you create a hospitable customer experience. Doing this will benefit your business by developing satisfied and loyal customers. There are effective techniques that we can pass on to your sales team to ensure that type of experience transpires. These techniques parallel how you treat guests in your home. We will explore these techniques as well as related educational opportunities to help employees

enhance those skills.

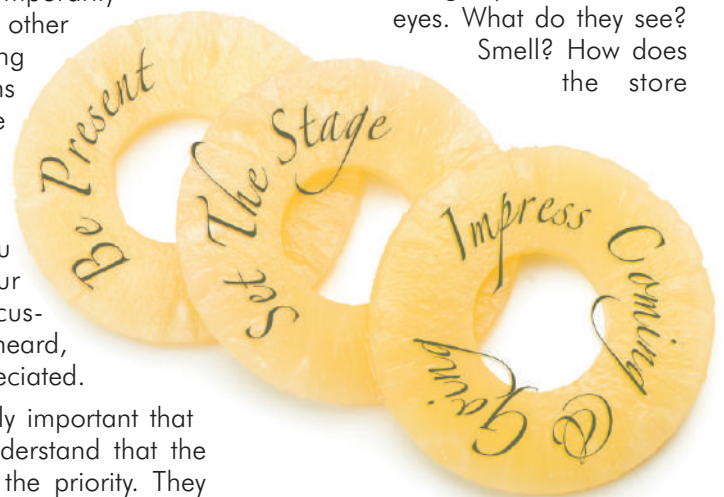
Below are three key areas we can focus on to ensure we are being hospitable to our valued furniture customers.

1 Be Present. With your hectic days and multiple distractions you can easily forget the fundamental concept of being present when interacting with customers. This means focusing completely on the interaction, tuning in, actively listening. In order to accomplish this, you and your staff must temporarily tune out all of the other items bouncing around in your brains as well as all of the other activities going on in the store. When you practice this, you demonstrate your interest and the customer feels seen, heard, respected and appreciated.

It is also incredibly important that your sales team understand that the customer is always the priority. They need to be trained to recognize the

importance of giving them their full attention. They need to know that it is not only okay, but important and expected that they put down the report (pillow, phone, etc.) and completely focus on the customer standing in front of them.

2 Set the Stage. When throwing a dinner or holiday party you are essentially striving to create a memorable experience for your guests. We can apply that same concept to your furniture showrooms. View the experience through your customers' eyes. What do they see? Smell? How does the store



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HOSPITALITY!

make them feel? How does the interaction make them feel? Was it memorable? Today's furniture customer is looking for more than a transaction; they are looking for the total buying experience.

Shopping for furniture is aspirational especially at this time of the year. Customers are heading into our stores with visions of holiday gatherings (it really is that time again) in their heads. You want to make sure your store is merchandised in a way that allows you to capitalize on the opportunity to meet those needs.

Training and Development: *Have team members walk the floor as if they were the customer seeing it for the first time. Ask them to report on what they see and how it makes them feel.*

3. Impress them Coming and Going: Remember that we make the biggest impression on your customers when they first walk in, and again when they are leaving your establishment. If you look at this interaction through the lens of treating a customer in your business the same way you would treat a guest in your home, the pattern becomes pretty clear. At home you greet your guest,

escort them to where they need to go, and offer them something to drink when appropriate. A great time to do this in your store is when you sit down to sketch with a customer. Finally, when your house guest or customer is ready to leave, you walk them to the door and let them know you appreciate that they took the time to stop by.

Be sure to end the interaction on a positive note. Whether you are walking out with the paperwork for a major purchase, coming back for a scheduled appointment or heading out empty-handed, you want them to leave with a great impression of your store and its people.

Training and Development: *Invite members of your sales team to brainstorm different strategies for making the customer feel cared for. Share and discuss how to best implement those strategies.*

As with so many behaviors, exuding hospitality is an expectation that you need to clearly communicate to your employees - throughout the store, front to back. You have to model this behavior, in other words, the philosophy and value of providing exceptional customer service has to come from

the top. These simple techniques can have a significant impact on your business. Demonstrating hospitality, showing customers respect, graciousness, and appreciation, will benefit your customers, team members, the bottom line, and will allow you to display that pineapple proudly.

About Rene' Johnston-Gingrich: Rene' Johnston-Gingrich is VP of Training Development for Profitability Consulting Group, specializing in delivering Design Trac: Design Skills for Retail Sales People, and Sales Trac III: In Home Selling. Rene' has owned and operated an interior design firm for 17 years and now works with organizations to ensure they have the best possible team environment.

She served as a regular columnist for The Lewiston Tribune Business Profile and is an adjunct faculty member of Lewis-Clark State College's Business Division. Rene' has a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Interior Planning and Design and a Master's Degree in Adult Education and Human Resource Development. Questions about this article or any sales/design topic can be directed to her at reneg@furninfo.com or call her direct at 208-790-3594.

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BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Surya

Serenade is hand tufted of 80% Viscose, and 20% Wool in this softer touch contemporary rug featuring a sunset palette. \$1,149 in 5'x8".

Contact information on index page 104.



Vintage Print Gallery

Offers an eclectic mix of print categories.

Shown here is one of several estate endorsed numbered prints by artist Tony Viramontes, who's work is currently being showcased in Bergdorf Goodman's famous window displays.

Contact information on index page 104.



Domicil

Built-in lumbar cushioning and curved frame comfortably envelops anyone who sits in this chair. Bold top-stitching in contrasting colors highlight the graceful sloping arms and back. Sirius is available in a range of full grain, luxe leathers.

Contact information on index page 104.

Home Trends Design

The Vail Coffee Table is crafted from solid Acacia wood. It features live edges, butterfly joints, and "V" shaped legs in nickel or black. Available in both natural and walnut finishes.

Contact information on index page 104.



Pastel

The Quanto Basta rectangular dining table has a 38" x 70" glass top with clean-lined Sonoma veneer wood frame and stainless steel base. Upholstered chairs have Sonoma veneer back and stainless steel frame.

Contact information on index page 104.



Tomlinson

Michael Wolk's 373 Sectional for Carter has been described as great comfort with an edgy contemporary flair. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 104.



Huppé

The Citta lounge chair is made of beech, imported from Italy, upholstered and finished in Canada. This elegant chair fits in any decor.

Contact information on index page 104.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Capel

Park Lane is a new collection of vintage hand knots, made in India of blended New Zealand and Argentine wool. Available light gold, vintage gold, light aqua, silver and vintage beige. Rug may retail for \$1,689.

Contact information on index page 104.



Elran

The Colton collection is contemporary in style. It features blanket chaise seating and oversized box arm with an exposed edge welt. Available in three seated sofa, two seated condo sofa, loveseat and chair. Shown here with contrast stitching. Made in Canada.

Contact information on index page 104.

Nouveau Concept

The AV473 is a 66" TV base. shown in Boreal color. It is Also available in 48" and 60" widths and 15 other colors. Made in Canada.

Contact information on index page 104.



Vig Furniture

The "Tempo" sectional is made with full Italian leather and a chrome frame that goes around the perimeter. It can be customized in different leather colors/dimensions and is equipped with five adjustable headrests.

Contact information on index page 104.



Country View Woodworking

The Platinum Series blends transitional flair with beauty and functionality. Shown here with serving table included as an accent. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 104.



Klaussner Home Furnishings

The Orlando group includes power reclining and power head rest with storage arms. The lighted cup holders feature a cooling system to keep drinks at the perfect temperature. The group also offers a drop down center table, two adjustable reading lights and two power outlets with USB port.

Contact information on index page 104.



Borkholder

From the 20th Century Collection this dining group is crafted of solid wood with nailhead detail on the chairs and an interesting pattern on the sideboard. Available in Cherry, Brown Maple and Red Oak. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 104.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Jaipur Rugs

Playful cut discs of felt give an ultra plush texture and feel to the Scandinavia collection, comprised of many different felted and textural looks.

Contact information on index page 104.

Twin Star

The Tresanti Paddington Heater Bench has Antique Ivory finish with Midnight Cherry accents. The top features a cubby shelf with mirrored back and 4 coat hooks. The bench has plenty of room for sitting while putting on coats and shoes, two cabinets, a fully extending drawer, and a Quartz InfraRed heater to heat up to a 1000 sq.ft room. Plugs into any standard 120v 3-prong outlet.

Contact information on index page 104.



Furniture Traditions

The Heritage Mirror, styled to compliment Furniture Traditions' bedroom groups as well as the ever popular Mid Wall pier group. The oversize mirror is completely beveled. Available in Alder and Oak. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 104.





Wallbeds

The new Euro Deluxe features interior shelving and an exclusive arch top, made from birch solids and veneers. Many other styles and finishes are available. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 104.



Loloi Rugs

The Xavier Collection is distinguished by its plush feel and bright, bold color palette. It is hand knotted with 100% jute from India. The large scale Ikat design offers sophistication that works as a centerpiece for a variety of room settings.

Contact information on index page 104.

Horizon Home

A new addition to the Graffiti collection is this 66" x 36" rectangular dining table with Landmark stenciled design over a time worn distressed finish. The industrial design metal legs have an industrial oxidized patina. Also available as a square.

Contact information on index page 104.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Rizzy Home

From The Highland Collection, this rug is 100% wool, hand tufted in India. Sizes available are 2'x3', 3'x5', 5'x8', 8'x10', 9'x12', 8'RD, 2'6"x8'. Suggested retail for the 5'x8' is \$699.

Contact information on index page 104.



Zimmerman Chair

This solid Cherry dining room is shown in Weathered Antiquity White Wash, one of four Weathered color options. This all in

coastal areas. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 104.



Greenington

Crafted in 100% solid Moso bamboo, the Tulip Collection is available in bar, counter, or dining height, with two color options.

Contact information on index page 104.

Abner Henry Fine Furniture

The 60" round "Edgewood" table transforms quickly to 80". Its expansion leaves are self-storing, and the entire piece is hand crafted using solid hardwoods. Shown in Cherry, it is also available in Oak, Maple, Walnut and thirty different stain colors. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 104.



Omnia

The sleek contemporary "Papillon" includes, built in storage end tables for maximum comfort and practicality. The contrasting stitching adds exquisite detail. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 104.



Copeland

Fusion occasional tables are an elegant display of the common ground unifying structure and aesthetic. Crafted of solid American Black Walnut and finished with a low sheen top coat. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 104.

American Revolution by Amish Designs

The Chelsea Creek dining group is contemporary in style. The table is 48" round and made of solid Cherry. Chairs have solid Cherry seats and backs with Ash spindles and legs. Comes in three colors, Natural (shown), Michaels Cherry and Onyx. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 104.

West Bros.

m Collection is made of Solid White Oak. Hand-crafted details include natural leather drawer pulls and textured wood planking. Available in natural and a rustic gray finish. Made in a.

Contact information on index page 104.



SHORTHANDLED AGAIN?

Tips for preparing your new mattress sales professionals for success.

by David Benbow

// It's almost Labor Day weekend, I'm shorthanded again, I've got two new-hires and I still need one more; and, as usual, I'm too swamped to train them, or even know where to start! What do I do?" Ever heard this before?

Is there any owner or manager of a small, medium or even large mattress store that has not had this dilemma more than once in his career? What retail furniture or mattress store in this country, large or small, has a surplus of phenomenally capable sales help? The answer to these troublesome questions is, of course, that virtually every store is constantly on the lookout for more and better sales help. But, even when you find and hire new, promising retail sales associates (RSAs) experienced or not, they still have to be trained before they can go on the sales floor.

DO MOST OF YOUR TRAINEES FAIL?

Training new-hires, as every small and large store owner knows, is a problem that never ends. Just when you think a candidate is making progress, suddenly one day he fails to show up for work and you never see him again. The wearisome repetitiveness of

this process makes preparing new hires one of the biggest time-wasting, money-wasting and generally dreaded efforts any store owner can deal with. While there is no real solution, there are some actions that can reduce time wasted on failed candidates and thereby cut the store's losses. And on a positive note, these actions are far more likely to produce what you really are looking for; the competent, loyal RSA.

SO, WHAT DO YOU DO?

First, let's start by looking at an example which illustrates what seems to be a fairly common and not particularly successful practice. I once

worked for a major, multi-city, multi-store mattress chain (now absorbed into a larger chain.) We had a dozen stores in the town where I worked. Even though the pay scale was generous for our industry, such was their turnover, that at least once per month, they would start a new, two week training class for new-hires. Each class might have as many as ten or twelve enrollees. The class was held at one of their busiest stores, right on the showroom floor and conducted by an experienced RSA (but not a certified trainer) who was, because of his duties as trainer, absent from the sales floor (when he should have been there) for at least half of the two week training period. The trainer spent most of his class time talking and lecturing. There were some limited written materials, but most of the information was presented in lecture form. Tests were given sporadically throughout the two week period culminating in a final exam. Even with that, at least half of the trainees usually "washed out" before the class was finished. Frequently, even the graduates would be gone from the company within a few weeks. You could probably count the successful candidates, the ones who were eventually effective on the floor and made the company money, on one hand by the end of the

The trainee must be made aware that the burden of his education will fall primarily on his shoulders. He will have all the material available. It is up to him to use it.





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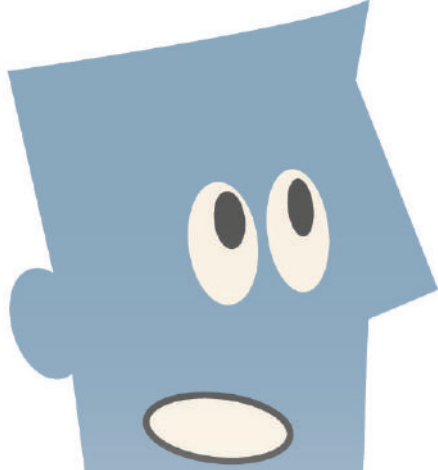
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"I can almost hear the groans coming from store owners now. "I'm the designated trainer! I can't even find one good salesperson, much less a dedicated trainer!"

year. So, does that sound like success? It sounds like about a 5 percent success ratio, doesn't it? The other 95 percent were a huge waste of time and money.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Why do so many RSA candidates fail? Is it the fault of the person who actually hired them? Maybe the applicants weren't screened properly? Or, maybe there just aren't very many good applicants out there to begin with. Some applicants make a good impression during the interview, and that is where their effort ends. They show their true colors when the real job starts. Or, is the training program itself the problem? Your new-hire is probably not a self-starter. He needs a tight, disciplined schedule. The weak training policy of many stores often does more harm than good.

MAYBE IT'S THE PROGRAM

After fifteen years as the owner (and

now former owner) of several small mattress stores located in even smaller metropolitan areas, I feel like I can speak with experience, and maybe even some confidence, about this problem. Not that this article is aimed solely at this audience, it just seems like we small owners have more problems with new-hires. I could go off on a long tirade about the demographic dilemma that faces many small towns. It's tough to find ambitious, talented candidates with initiative who are willing to start a new, uncertain job at low wages. I will save that discussion for another issue.

"STRUCTURED" ENVIRONMENT

Have you ever heard the phrase, "So-and-so functions better in a 'structured' environment?" In the case of sales trainees, pretty much every candidate qualifies as "so-and-so," meaning that every new hire needs to be told what he is supposed to do.

Don't let your poor new-hire, after filling out the W-4 and other necessary forms, wander aimlessly around the store for hours while you are doing a comfort exchange or paying bills. A structured training program would put them to work immediately without you being directly involved. It sounds good on paper, but what exactly do we mean by the phrase "structured training environment?" Let's start by examining that phrase.

First, you need a disciplined, experienced trainer with real sales experience who understands your training program. This trainer should have some portion of his work day devoted to the training process, meaning that, during this devoted time, he doesn't have to take time off the sales floor, or stop unloading trucks in order to perform his training duties. Does this individual have to be a full-time trainer? We'll answer that in a few paragraphs.

Second, you need to prepare a full-



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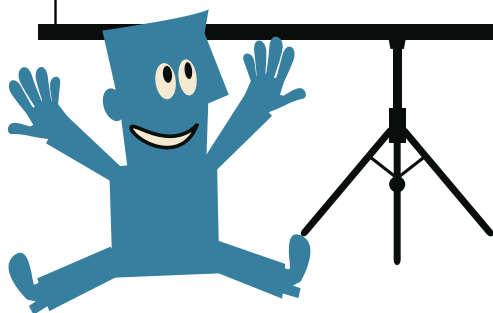
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Everybody, even the guy with 10 years of experience (and probably 10 years of ingrained bad habits,) goes through the initial training. Please allow no exceptions to this rule.



however long that is. Sounds a lot like high school and college, doesn't it? Even if you think American public education is

in crisis, it is probably more a crisis of current policies than the educational theory on which it was originally based.

I can almost hear the groans coming from store owners now. "I'm the designated trainer! I can't even find one good salesperson, much less a dedicated trainer! How am I supposed to follow your well-intentioned but impractical suggestion? Emergencies pop up every minute of the day and I have to stop everything and handle them!" Well, yes, I understand the problem. As I said, I spent fifteen years in the same boat. I understand that the store owner is not only the educator but also the (1) lead RSA, (2) sales manager, (3) book-keeper, (4) warehouse manager, (5) advertising guru, (6) finance wizard, (7) and janitor (and who knows what else?) To

pull all this off, you really must possess a stern self-discipline to manage your time. So, that just makes the structured program all the more important, doesn't it? With the structured program, you don't need to spend as much time with your trainees. The correct execution of the program should keep your new-hires busy and on the ball.

HOW DOES IT HELP?

It should be clear by now, to you, the busy store owner/manager/trainer, that anything that takes some of the load off your busy day should be welcome news. So, how, in practice, does a Structured Training Program help the harried store owner? Let's ask the question again, "What exactly do we mean when we say "Structured Training Program?" Let's give an example that almost everybody has some familiarity with. Let's say you take a course, such as Interpreting Shakespeare, in your local community college continuing education program. You don't just walk into class and find no materials and no syllabus. It's all prepared right there in front of you, isn't it? You just follow the plan and do what each class expects of you (or, even better, more than is expected of you.) Your instructor is probably not a full-time instructor, either. He proba-

"The point of this article is to analyze and figure out how to force-feed this information to the new-hire, as efficiently and quickly as possible."

time, rigorous class schedule that is ready to go the minute the candidate finishes filling out his or her paperwork. All courses should be defined, study material available and tests administered and graded to identify candidates who fall behind. Each and every day (and all day) should be organized so that each trainee knows exactly what is expected. There should be a training manual and a syllabus that explains the plan for every day for the duration of the training period,

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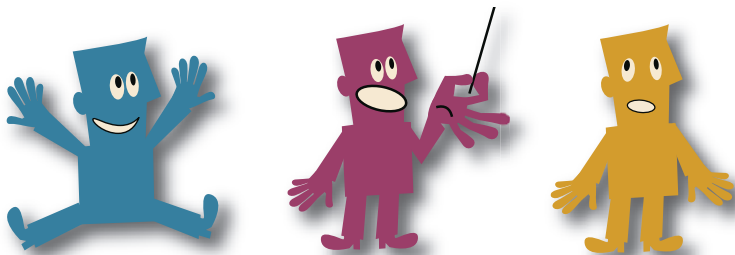
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PREPARE NEW SALESPEOPLE

bly has a day job. The school assumes that the student is an adult, and his success or failure is the result of the effort he applies to the course.

This example sort of describes your situation as the store owner/manager, does it not? You already have a full-time job, too. Therefore, you need a class plan that is already complete and in-place before you even hire new people. This structured class puts the burden of training where it belongs, on the trainee, not the trainer. When the trainees already know what they are supposed to study, every day, all day, the store owner/trainer spends little or no time babysitting his charges. In a college class, the instructor plays only a limited role, doesn't he? He administers the course, lectures briefly, answers a few questions and grades the tests. Why shouldn't the RSA training class work the same way?

WHAT DOES THIS PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

That is a big subject, the details of which are probably too extensive for this essay. For that reason, we will only give a general outline. The big question is, "How do we construct such a program?" Before we start, let us define a couple of basic terms.

The act or process of selling retail (or selling anything, for that matter) can be thought of as comprising two distinct, but interrelated packages of information. These packages consist of two basic components:

- *Passive Knowledge.*
- *Active Knowledge.*

Now, please don't think we are trying to rewrite sales theory, or invent any new concepts. The point of these definitions is to divide the learning process into more digestible segments.

PASSIVE KNOWLEDGE

The passive knowledge consists of the "five groups of knowledge" that John F. Lawhon defined many years ago in his book "Selling Retail". These groups or categories are:

1. *Product knowledge.*
2. *Knowledge of your inventory.*
3. *Knowledge of your advertising.*
4. *Knowledge of credit or financing.*
5. *Knowledge of policies.*

You could add another category which could be generally defined as "industry knowledge." Mr. Lawhon did not invent these categories; he just grouped and defined them in a way that is easier to understand for the

trainee. I refer to these categories as "passive" because just knowing them does not imply that any further action is called for. The groundskeeper might know them, or the book-keeper, but they won't be using them on the sales floor. It's kind of like studying your car's automatic transmission by reading a book about it, but never raising the hood.

ACTIVE KNOWLEDGE

Active knowledge is the sales process itself, which is really another knowledge category all its own, with its own organizing principles. The sales process can use any part of the passive knowledge as a tool, when needed. Major parts of the sales process include:

- *Greeting the customer.*
- *Qualifying the customer.*
- *Helping the customer select the right product for him or her.*
- *Presenting the features and*

All trainees should be on probation for a certain period, usually 90 days or so. Even after the intensive early first couple of weeks of training, don't ease up. It takes a long time to become a real professional in this business.

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"How much do you want your new RSA to know before he takes his first up?"

benefits of the selected product to the customer.

- *Closing the sale.*
- *Finishing the sale and doing a productive good-bye.*

This "active" part is where you raise the hood and get your hands dirty. But, it won't do much good unless you learn what the transmission looks like to begin with.

Now, I know that everybody in sales beyond the basest trainee is familiar with these concepts. I understand that, so don't abandon me here. The point of this article is to analyze and figure out how to force-feed this information to the new-hire, as efficiently and quickly as possible. I know that you, the store owner, know this stuff, but how do you teach the new-hire, who is now on the payroll and devouring the company's money. Don't forget, every minute counts with the rookie. He needs to be educated as quickly as possible. At minimum, it will take three months to get this new guy or girl productive. Don't turn it into six months or longer.

HOW LONG SHOULD TRAINING LAST?

Well, training never really ends, even for the professional. But for this discussion, we're talking about the initial, intensive training that you must do before the new-hire takes his first "up."

How long do you train new-hires? How do you know when he is trained? To answer this, let's use a simple formula. Of course, to use the formula, you should understand what goes into the formula. First, how much do you want your new RSA to know before he

takes his first up? This sounds like a tough question, and it is. But, here is a way to find an answer. The goal of training is to produce a productive RSA, right? The marker of when he is ready to go on the floor is his passing (or, preferably aching) the final test. I'd like to suggest that a lot of thought go into the composing of the final test. This test should reveal how much the trainee has absorbed. What material do you need to cover with the trainee before he is ready for the final test? Go back to the section on page 64 "What Does this Program Look Like" for an outline. Once you have decided how much material the trainee must cover to ace the final test, then you must analyze how much material the trainee can reasonably cover in one day. So, the equation is as follows: if you have 100 units of information that the trainee needs to learn and the trainee, by staying focused and busy, can absorb 10 units in a day, then the answer is: you need ten days for initial training. Note that this is just a formula. You should plug in your own numbers.

HOW DOES IT WORK IN THE REAL WORLD?

Now let's talk about how to make this work in real life. Either during the applicant's interview or when you offer the applicant the job, you should make it very clear to the trainee how the training process will work. Remember, the main reason you are reading this is to save time and money. Here is a list to follow:

1. The trainee must be made aware that the burden of his education will fall primarily on his shoulders. He will have all the material available. It is up to him to use it.

2. The trainee must also be made aware that the store expects visible and prompt results. Sales success is measured by results. I trust nobody disagrees with that. Sales education success should also be measured by results. This means the applicant must be tested regularly and consistently.

3. The trainee must understand that the store will have a very low tolerance for failure or goofing off. Absence of or slowing of progress should be rewarded by early dismissal of the candidate.

4. The candidate must be made to understand that the trainer will be available only at certain, pre-defined time slots. If the candidate has questions, he should write them down and ask them when the trainer is available.

5. All trainees should be on probation for a certain period, usually 90 days or so. Even after the intensive early first couple of weeks of training, don't ease up. It takes a long time to become a real professional in this business. Keep up the training even after the RSA has assumed floor duties.

6. Everybody, even the guy with 10 years of experience (and probably 10 years of ingrained bad habits,) goes through the initial training. Please allow no exceptions to this rule. Your store is unique. Your products, policies, inventory, advertising and financing are unique.

7. Set up a daily schedule which includes:

- *The goals and study material for the day.*

SHORTHANDED AGAIN?

- *Test times for the day.*
- *Allotted time slots when the trainer is available.*

There is one point in all this narrative which, if you haven't already figured it out, I cannot stress enough. It is so important that I'm going to write it in capital letters. **KEEP THEM BUSY!** Your new hires should not have any down-time while progressing through your new structured training program. If they aren't kept busy, they are far more likely to get in your way, and their minds are much more likely to wander off into dangerous territory.

One other important point: ban all cell phones during the training period.

With this kind of program, you will achieve two important things. First, you won't be fretting over your new-hires all day, and secondly, by regular testing, you can eliminate the non-starters quickly, before they cost you a lot of money and before they infect the other candidates with their attitude.

HOW DO I GET THIS SET UP?

Ideally, what you would like to have is a pre-built template which contains:

- *The groups of knowledge in detail.*
- *The sales process in its correct sequence and place, in detail.*

This template will allow you to plug in data that is unique to your store. It will create daily chores and learning tasks for the trainee and then generate a test so you can find out what they learned and even more importantly, what they did not learn. This is not quite as simple as it sounds. To my knowledge, no template of this type exists, so you will have to take the time to gather your information and build it yourself. Not only that, your store, its

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One other important point: **ban all cell phones during training.**

products, policies, inventory, etc. are always evolving, so it is a moving target that will never be finished. Getting a program defined and in writing, once and for all, however, will be a time and money saver for future training efforts. Don't forget, your store, you hope, will be there for a long time. Your sales help probably won't. You know that there is never a last time that you will train new-hires. Make it as easy as possible.

WHERE DO I FIND A PROTOTYPE FOR THIS PLAN?

Go back to the groups of knowl-

edge and the steps of the sale to find a good outline. Fill in your unique details. Do this before you hire new people. You will not have time once you have trainees begging for your attention.

WHAT KIND OF RESULTS CAN I EXPECT, IF ANY?

Will this program produce better RSAs? Maybe it will, maybe it won't. Since success is almost always solely dependent on the drive and desire of the candidate, I'm not going to sit here and tell you that this idea will turn a mediocre candidate into a sales

star. What it will do, however, is save you time, because your candidates should stay busy without your prodding. It will also save you money, because you will identify your dead wood early, before you over-pay them and get nothing in return.

About David Benbow: David Benbow, a twenty-three year veteran of the mattress and bedding industry, is owner of Mattress Retail Training Company. Dave's company offers mattress retailers a full array of retail guidance; from small store management to training retail sales associates (RSAs.) Dave's many years of hands-on experience as retail sales associate, store manager, sales manager/trainer and store owner of multiple stores in six different American metropolitan areas uniquely qualifies him as an expert in selling bedding at the retail level.

David is the author of the recently published book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual". This book is the first book to systematically present a complete, organized, but easily read and understood text book for mattress and bedding retail sales associates, beginner and experienced professional alike. It is a complete training course in one 292 page book. The book can be purchased on-line at either <http://www.bedsellersmanual.com> or <http://www.mattressretailtraining.com>.

He also offers hands-on training classes for retailers on a variety of subjects and issues as well as on-line classes that can be downloaded from the websites mentioned above.

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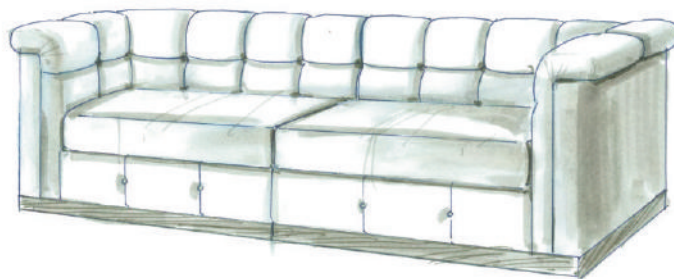
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MENTORING

Tips for jump starting the furniture careers of young employees and co-workers.

by Gordon Hecht

There is no "People Magazine" or "Entertainment Weekly" for our furniture industry, but we do have a lot of people, and some of them are very entertaining! When publications like Furniture World and other trade journals feature articles about people in the Home Furnishings Industry, I always take time to read them and look for a name I know.

One term often used to describe our industry's leaders is VETERAN. However after just completing four decades in our industry, I never want to be known as a 40-year veteran, instead, I plan to continue on as a 40-year MAVERICK! One of great honors I received lately is having several co-workers and industry contacts calling me their mentor. I suppose that my role of mentor includes sharing the wisdom to help them become successful by transferring my experiences

of achievement and failure, and how to gain the first and avoid the latter.

I have been fortunate to have worked for some very entertaining people who helped me survive and succeed in our business. Let me share the knowledge they passed on to me.

Las Vegas in the early 1970s was a boom town. Just a stone's throw from the World Market Center (assuming you can throw a stone a mile and a half) at the corner of West Charleston and Valley View was Jay's Carpet and Furniture. My entry into retail was as a delivery helper, the guy on the other end of the sofa. The pay was two dollars an hour and the work week was six days long. The owner was Jim Talbert, who many people called Jay, based on the name of the store. Unbridled by any HR rules or law, and before the days of "coaching", Jim's directives often took shape in loud

statements mixed with four-letter words surrounding various body parts.

Each morning after the trucks were loaded, and before the delivery team hit the road, Jim would remind us, "This is a full truck, come back when it's empty". I learned several things from that nine-word statement. First, we as the delivery team had the responsibility to make sure each customer received the right merchandise, and those items had to be delivered in good condition. Also, we had to work around the customer's schedule-often

"Jay asked, 'How would you work with customers if you had \$1,000,000 in the bank?'"

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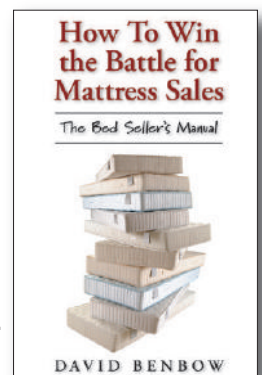
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"He offered me a raise saying, "If you want more money, go out and write yourself a raise!"

returning to "not at home" customers after our route was done. We worked until the day's job was done. Lastly, drivers were expected to be the second salesman and needed to have the ability to convince customers to accept less than perfect merchandise with the promise of service to make their purchase right. For those starting in our business in the 21st Century, there was NO even exchange policy in those prehistoric days.

Full and part time delivery jobs gave me spending money through college,

also known as the best five years of my life. Having spent half of a decade working outside lifting sleeper sofas and armoires in the hot Nevada sun, it occurred to me that it might be easier to just lift a Bic pen inside an air conditioned building, and I landed a sales job in a Drexel-Heritage Showroom.

Part of my indoctrination into commission sales included the experience of high-end shoppers not always having confidence to invest large sums of money with a kid wearing a

Montgomery Ward suit and a Bar Mitzvah tie. The discouragement and low earnings of my first 90 days was nearly devastating.

One of the salesmen (no one had ever heard of an RSA then) took pity on me and worked with me to improve my skills. Jay Merrick was a World War II veteran who had owned a chain of sewing machine stores. He sold them at age 45 realizing enough profit to live well for the rest of his life. He was 56 when I was 22. He asked me a simple question that changed





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MENTORING MAVERICKS



the way I sold and worked all through my career.

Jay asked "How would you work with customers if you had \$1,000,000 in the bank?" I thought about it for a while, and my answer covered several points. I would always:

- Provide the customer with accurate information about the products I sell.
- Provide the customer with accurate information about delivery time and process.
- Work one-on-one with that customer and not think about the next or last "up".
- Build a relationship that would cause the customer to become a client for life.
- Look at my next "up" as a person not as a paycheck.
- Work to assess their total needs, and not just look for the quick sale.
- Follow up to make sure that the company I work for lives up to my commitments.

"I learned that you don't ask for a promotion. You assume the leadership role and earn that new position."

Jay promised me that if I started to work that way, that I would never have to worry about earning enough money, and maybe someday have \$1,000,000 in the bank.

I learned three other maxims that day:

- People love to buy, but hate to be sold.
- People will always buy from a friend, but will rarely be sold by a stranger.
- Business goes where it's invited, and returns where it's appreciated.

Essentially, give your shopper the power to make a logical decision. Next, work to make a friend first, and then work to make a sale. Finally, invite business to your store by asking each customer to buy, and after they purchase, show them you appreciate them by doing exactly what you promised you would do.

I stayed with that Drexel-Heritage Showroom for seven years, becoming #2 in sales out of 80+ people in my first full year. Eventually I became a store manager, but that took some coaching and prodding! Louis Landro

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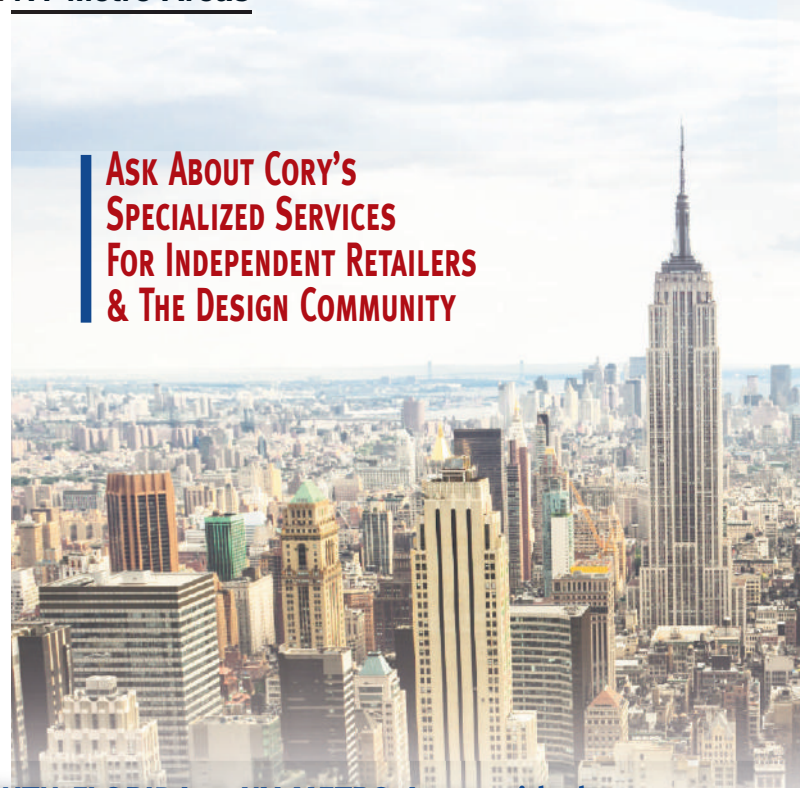
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"Thirty and forty-year veterans cannot be mentors, but mavericks can! Veterans tell war stories and talk about the old days."



was the Store Manager and he helped me understand how to think of my sales job as my own business franchise.

Compensation for salespeople at D-H was strictly commission. In my early days when my pay was closer to minimum wage, I once commented to Louis that I worked so hard, and I

deserved a pay raise. He offered me a raise saying, "If you want more money, go out and write yourself a raise!" I quickly understood that my employer provided me with a 25,000 square foot showroom, eight to ten shoppers a day, access to a phone and a desk, and a staff to process and deliver any orders I might create. I

now had my own franchise, all at no cost to me. The business was my own and it was up to me to make it fail or succeed. Best of all, I realized that there was no ceiling to my earnings except the limits of my own efforts and talents.

Sales production picked up for me. With the knowledge and experience that two years employment gave me, I was ready to step up on the career ladder. I told Louis that I wanted to be a Sales Manager. His advice, "If you want to be a sales manager, act like a Sales Manager, and if you want to be a Store Manager someday, act like a Store Manager." I learned that you don't ask for a promotion. You assume the leadership role and earn that new position. Always think and act beyond the four walls of your job description.

This advice jump-started my career and has allowed me to be a maverick in our business. Since that early start, I have benefited from other mentors. Because of my travel schedule, my mentoring comes from a distance, most recently from Ron Wanek and Todd Wanek. They helped me re-learn the furniture business when I joined Ashley Furniture Industries at age 49 and transitioned from Retail to the Manufacturing side. And, they have helped me re-learn the business every year since joining their World-Class organization.

Another great mentor and maverick, my father, Leonard Hecht. Selling televisions in the 1950s, furniture in the 1960s, and new homes in the 1970s and on, he started when selling was a respected and desired pro-



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MAVERICKS

fession, and not just a job until your “real” job comes around. He gave me advice on washing cars, low margins and volume, and how to handle difficult shoppers. I can’t share that advice in a printed column! But I can share his observation of business. “Nothing happens in this country until the sale is made”, was a saying I heard often. Everyone is selling something-products, ideas, even laws and taxes. But none of those go into production or effect until the deal is closed.

Thirty and forty-year veterans cannot be mentors, but mavericks can! Veterans tell war stories and talk about the old days. Mavericks buck the system, blaze a trail and burn with a healthy dissatisfaction for the status quo. Be more than a boss or manager. Take time to guide your young employees or even your co-workers. Show them the road to success and paint a picture using their colors. Share your knowledge and show them your passion. Chances are they will grow from your knowledge and pass it on to the next round of rookies!

Editor’s Note: If you have a story to tell about your “Maverick Mentor” or being one, please email it to Furniture World at russ@furninfo.com.

Gordon Hecht: Gordon Hecht is a 39 year maverick of the Home Furnishing business starting as a Delivery Helper in Las Vegas, NV. Following a successful sales, store management, and multi-store management career he joined Ashley Furniture Industries. In his role as National Director of Sales for Ashley Sleep Gordon helps Retailers improve Bedding Sales through training, merchandising and display. He lives in Columbus, OH with his wife Michelle. Questions or comments can be directed to Gordon Hecht at Ghecht@ashleyfurniture.com.

FURNITURE WORLD

TIPS

Bedroom Furniture Survey Results

Recent survey results show that 90 percent of consumers are looking to turn their master bedrooms into a tranquil retreat. Leggett & Platt’s Adjustable Beds Division found that most Americans haven’t organized their bedrooms in at least six months. Bedrooms are also quickly becoming more of a “Productivity Suite” in the 21st century as consumers use the bedroom for much more than just sleeping. Below are several retail tips based on the survey.

• **Finding:** Forty-eight percent of consumers believe that better organization can help turn their bedroom into an oasis.

Tip: Create a product display to showcase a tranquil retreat that allows customers to easily picture themselves using the product.

• **Finding:** Forty percent of respondents admit that the bedroom is where they hide clutter in their home.

Tip: Incorporate survey results into traditional advertisements like newspapers or direct mail to highlight a growing need based on consumer insights.

• **Finding:** Many haven’t reorganized their bedrooms in quite some time.

Tip: Engage consumers with creative ideas to get organized and offer suggestions about how technology, such as adjustable beds, can eliminate the need for other furniture and potentially maximize space for storage.

• **Finding:** More than 50% of consumers use the bedroom as a place to relax.

Tip: Ask fun questions about the best ways to relax to open a conversation and ultimately close the sale.

• **Finding:** Nearly half (48%) of those in a relationship say they would like something of their significant other’s to “disappear” from their bedroom.

Tip: Use compelling data like this to get a customer thinking about the perfect bedroom and help find a “happy medium” in an entertaining way.

About Leggett & Platt® Adjustable Bed Group: The Leggett & Platt® Adjustable Bed Group is a division of the global diversified manufacturer Leggett & Platt®. See all of the tips posted to date in this series at <http://www.furninfo.com/series/BedroomBattlesSurvey>.



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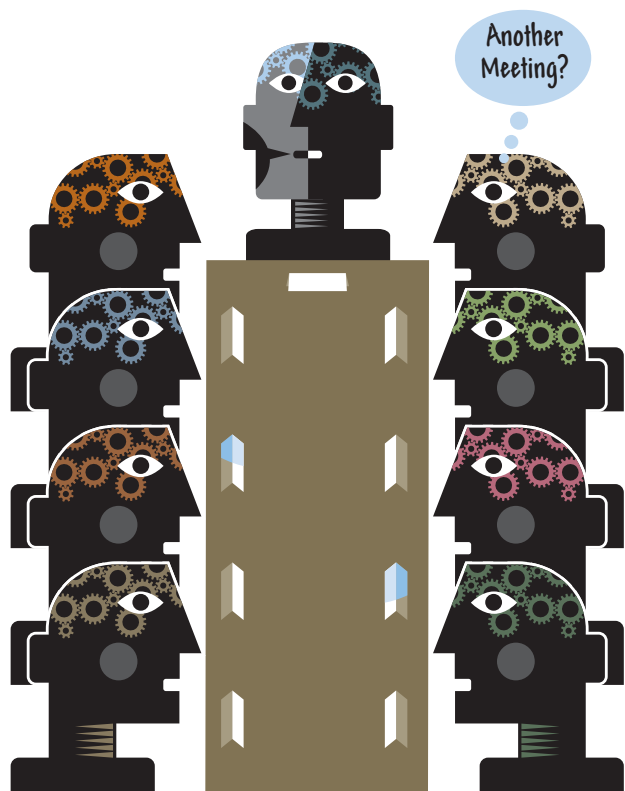
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SHOULD WE MEET?

Seven important meeting types that set the stage for retail success.

by David McMahon

Business people like to get things done. They don't like to waste time. They like to act fast and move on to the next thing. There is too little time to meet, right?

Professional meetings are rare in many retail furniture organizations. Executives, department managers and employees meet only when a situation calls for it. In other businesses, preset meetings occur too often. They can waste time BECAUSE they are undirected – seemingly meeting only to meet.

Meetings can be of great benefit to any organization when led properly with the proper purpose. They can define strategic direction and keep everyone on task toward achieving goals. In this writing, I will summarize seven meeting types that are proven to direct any organization to achieving its goals.

#1 EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT

This is a high level meeting that should be held once per month. Its purpose is company strategy and overall performance review. This is where financial results are evaluated with respect to the budgetary plan.

Those that sit for this meeting are the CEO (or President), the CFO (or Consulting CFO), and the Ownership Group.

Executive meetings must be well organized. If they are chaotic, this will trickle-down through the rest of the organization. If they are held professionally, this attitude will extend throughout the rest of the business. Far too often owners complain that a certain employee or department is not performing, when these same owners don't even sit still for one hour per month to focus on their business performance. If you want to maximize your profit volume potential, ensure you have a professional focus starting at the top.

Sample Agenda: Executive Management Meeting:

Time: 10th Day of the Month
9-10:30

Meeting Director: CEO.

Attendees: CEO, CFO, Ownership Group, Other Top Level Executives.

- General Business Climate – CEO.
- Review of executive action items.
- Performance to budgetary plan –

CFO:

- Cash Flow
- Profit
- General Operating Expense
- Sales
- Recommendations

- Company Direction – CEO.
- Expansion items or major asset sales or purchases - CEO.
- Any major impending initiatives or issues – CEO, CFO.
- Open Discussion – Executive group.
- Document any action items.

This meeting is fast. Minute notes should be taken or recorded. The CEO can discuss his observations on how the company is performing with respect to its strategic plan. The status of any action items assigned by the executive group in the previous meeting is reported. The CFO then reviews the results. He or she starts with reporting of cash levels as this is the ultimate report card on company strength. Then, the CFO reviews profit and sales data with respect to set projections. It is critical for the executive group to know monthly whether they are hitting their targets. If the



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...are held each and every week. The head of the department meets with all her direct reports to review the department performance to plan.."

CFO waits 3 months to discuss this, it is too late. The CEO then takes over and reviews company direction and any major purchases that should be approved. Initiatives and general business ideas are discussed amongst the executive members. Finally, any action items are documented.

#2 OPERATIONS MEETINGS

Operation meetings are held each and every week. If the CEO is away, they are still held. There are no excuses for a company missing an Op meeting. The purpose is to turn strategy into action and then to report on the results of the actions taken. This critical meeting connects executive direction with the people who manage

it – the department managers: Sales, Marketing, Distribution, Service, Administration/HR, IT, and Financial.

Sample Agenda:
Operations Meeting

Time: Every Friday: 8:00-9:30

Meeting Director: CEO or Operations Manager

Attendees: CEO, CFO, Operations Head, Head of Sales, Distribution Manager, Head of IT, Marketing Manager, Customer Service Manager, Office Manager, Human Resources.

- Opening discussion about business climate – CEO.
- Performance to Plan - Round table format – each department head reports on performance.
- Major Project Updates - Round table format – each department head reports on any projects in the pipeline and any action items previously assigned.
- New Action Items Assigned – CEO or operations head.

Inter-departmental communication is strengthened with this meeting. A team atmosphere is embraced. There is less "us" and "them" bickering in the long-run with this open type of forum. This group acts like a performance group in that it allows attendees to report their performance, voice their issues, and get/give guid-

ance on the best course for improvement. Operations is a chain. All parts of that chain MUST come together regularly to identify areas to focus on. After the meeting, the respective managers take their direction back to members of their departments.

#3 TEAM MEETINGS EACH DEPARTMENT

Department meetings are held each and every week. The head of the department meets with all her direct reports to review department performance to plan. As a group, they identify areas of improvement. This is a key link in the chain to those who produce.

These meetings are held with the most important people in the company – line employees who sell, market, distribute, service, and support retail products and services. Their job performance determines the success of the company. Executives strategize. Managers manage. Employees execute.

This meeting brings the company strategy to tactical execution under the direction of the department managers. Any distinct area of a business needs a designated leader. Without defining that leader, the leader will be defined organically. That means – defined on its own. This is the way groups of people work. In other words, if you don't have a sales manager, someone will take control of that group by default. It is obvious that any

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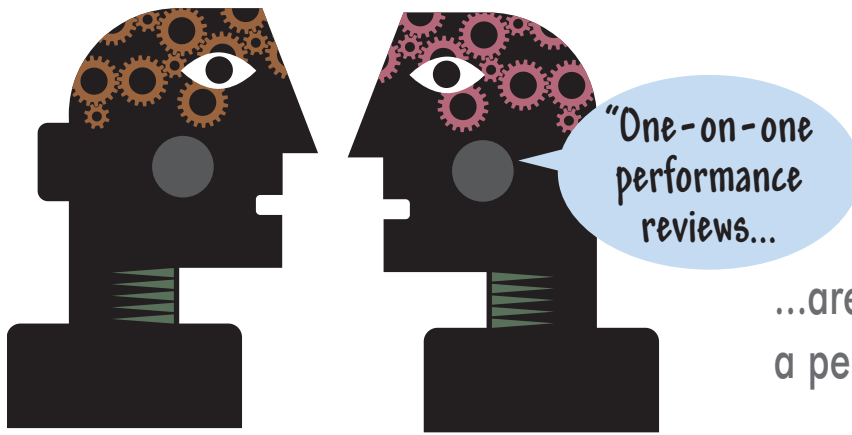


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...are not a report card. They are a person to person conversation."

important part of your business needs someone to manage the execution of corporate strategy. So, these designated leaders need to meet as a group with their teams. They should meet weekly and discuss progress toward their goals as a team. They need to understand how achieving their individual and team goals affect other departments and the survival of the company as a whole.

#4 ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

These are the most out-of-the-box

thinking meetings. They can have a massive impact on improving your business. A one-on-one meeting is simple. A manager meets with his or her direct reports once per month for about 30 minutes. The CEO meets with the executive team or department heads. The CFO meets with the operational and financial staff. The department managers meet with their reports. Everyone meets with someone, routinely.

You might say, "Wow that is a lot of meeting time. That might take away from their work time."

I say, "Just try it for 3 months." You will likely find:

- People truly appreciate being heard.
- People will tell you things that will improve your business.
- Everyone will perform better as a team.

One-on-one meetings are not performance reviews. They are not a report card. They are a person to person conversation. Just keep it simple with a few topic questions to stimulate conversation:

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"You might say, 'Wow that is a lot of meeting time. That might take away from their work time.'"



- How are things going?
- Do you see any areas that we could improve?
- Do you have any ideas for us as a business?

After the meeting, document some quick notes so that you can act on any good ideas and review them for the next meeting. Also, during the general course of business, take note of anything the employee might have performed well so that you can compliment him at the start of the meeting. Recognition for many people means as much as monetary reward.

#5 PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

These are training meetings. Their purpose is to advance the performance of the team through education. Your competitors are constantly seeking to improve themselves by implementing better techniques and processes. To stay ahead of them, you must commit to continuous improvement. For example, a business should conduct continuous training on best business practices. A sales department needs continual updating in product knowledge, selling techniques, and systems. If you expect to just show someone how to do something for the first couple of months of their employment and then let them go on autopilot, you will not see maximal results. Look at the pharmaceutical sales world: they constantly monitor and train throughout an employee's tenure. Far too often I see potentially great employees thrown to the

wolves after an initial training period. A manager's job is to provide training and elevate the team. If that is not happening then the CEO should look at how managers are being directed.

Performance improvement sessions can be done as needed wherever attention is required. If one area of your business requires focus, like speed of inventory management, for example, then focus your efforts on improving that. However, even if there is not an apparent problem, current ways of doing things should constantly be challenged. That is how the best get better.

#6 ALL COMPANY MEETING

This is an all company pep rally. It should be held once per month by the CEO. All employees and managers should be in attendance, if available. One purpose is to strengthen the bond of everyone to the ultimate commander of the entity. As well, the meeting is to remind everyone of the direction the company is pursuing.

#7 PERFORMANCE GROUP MEETINGS

A CEO or owner should work on the business rather than in the business. If a CEO stays inside his or her world 100% of the time, it will be impossible to work properly on the business. This is where performance groups come in to play. I can tell you first hand that 80% of the CEOs in the performance groups that I lead outperform their competition and their industry in profitability year after year.

This is no fluke. When you get smart people together for a business retreat, great things happen. I am not going to go into the details of the magic that can occur here. I just advise you to seek out a group of like-minded individuals, outside your business, with a great leader. If you find this, you will benefit from peer support and continual education in business acumen. You will be exposed to best practices and learn to solve big challenges. You will be expected, and motivated, to achieve your goals. You will obtain a camaraderie that is not available within your business. You will be able to bring actionable practices back to your business to maximize your potential.

There are other meetings that occur, of course. However, it is these seven that set the stage. They will have the largest impact on your business overall. They will keep the CEO or owner more in touch with managers and employees. They will allow managers to be more effective in accomplishing company strategy. They will help employees stay on task and feel more comfortable in their individual roles within the organization.

About David McMahon: David McMahon is a Certified Management Accountant and Management Consultant with PROFITconsulting, a division of PROFITsystems.

Questions about this or any of David's articles archived on FURNITURE WORLD Magazine's website at <http://www.furninfo.com/Authors/List> can be directed to Davidm@profitsystems.com or call 800-888-5565.

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ASTONE HOME STUDIO

Vertically integrated retailer relies on word of mouth to appeal to the high end.

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

Generally speaking, when you contemplate any of our great industry success stories, there springs to mind a logical natural progression, a variety of ups and downs and the occasional moments of insight. But with the ongoing tale of Enzo and Frank Astone and sons Michael and Daniel, the past 30 years have been marked by lightning strikes of inspiration, startling creativity, and an apparently instinctive feeling for target demographics, all firmly rooted in

their sturdy foundation of “honesty and passion”, the brothers’ credo.

Their original brain child, Superior Frames Ltd., began as a small, traditionally rooted but highly creative manufacturing enterprise with the basic intent of providing solid wood frames to the local upholstering industry.

The company developed powerful off-shoots, both national and international, in hospitality, hotels and casinos (Superior Seating Hospitality), and fully furnished sales suites for major condo developers in the Greater Toronto Area (Superior Suites Interiors). “They’ve called us their interior design ‘secret weapon’”, said Enzo, CEO. As the technological age encroached upon us all, a vibrantly visualized and colorful online retail store/consumer shopping website

came to life (lovethatinterior.com). Most recently, reaching out to acclaimed interior designers and, through them, the affluent consumer, they opened the doors of Astone Home Studio, at present one location in the City of Vaughan, north of Toronto close to theme park Canada’s Wonderland. Down the road certainly more Studios are featured in their master plan. Obviously, the sky’s the limit. Or maybe not.

Our question to them, since they’re willing to share their thinking, is how did this come about? What is embedded in the Astone story that explains and makes accessible their success pathway? What’s the secret, guys?

Enzo immediately replied, “Passion!”, closely followed by “Honesty!” Passion is joy, intensity of focus, creative energy, “Perhaps a bit

“We reach out from the mundane, the boredom and the monotony of cautious thought, let people think large, crazy thoughts.”



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Frank is pictured to the left of Enzo. Also an interior shot of Astone Home Studio.



"Enzo and Frank made a strategic decision to re-brand Superior to be a high end retailer, 'the Ferrari of furniture', where clients would get premium products and excellent service."

of craziness!" he laughed. And honesty? "Professionalism and integrity, belief in our history, insistence on perfection, quality, superb service and demonstrable value." From this evolved the corporate identity expressed in the name "Superior", no accident, a key to the fulcrum of the dream, and ongoing, infinite branding. "Superior defines who we are."

Of course, there's more to it. Much more.

Many decades ago, the beginning before the beginning, the Astones grew and thrived in Cosenza in the province of Calabria, Italy, a mountainous region near the tip of Italy's boot, a city of memories perched 600 metres above the sea. Enzo and Frank's parents owned a wood-work-

ing enterprise, crafting windows and doors for local construction companies and their neighbors. First Frank, and then Enzo, restless entrepreneurial teenagers, set their youthful sights on the broader horizons of North America, at that time and maybe still, the continent of opportunity.

Said Enzo, "Frank was already working at American Frames when I arrived in Toronto, and I joined him there. I was a teenage troublemaker, ambitious, wanted to make things happen, still do. Frank is more pragmatic, he can strategize and implement, he's both creative and good with numbers and planning. He couldn't speak English and neither could I," he laughed again, "and I still can't! But it didn't matter since 90 per cent of the people in the furniture industry couldn't either." Fluent, articulate, Enzo's richly calibrated Pavarotti accent is warm and engaging. "But not too many years passed, both of us observing, focusing, looking to find new ways, and mining our own creativity, defining potential markets, before we launched our own small business, just five capable and

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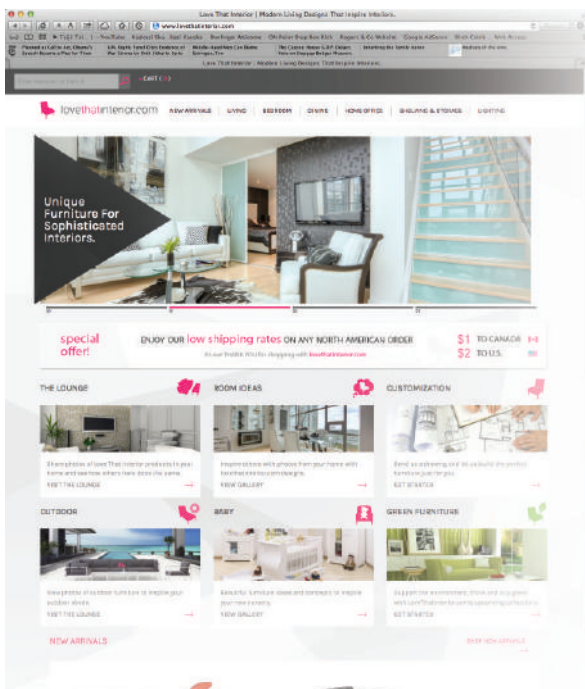
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"A vibrantly visualized and colorful online retail store/consumer shopping website came to life (lovethatinterior.com). Most recently, reaching out to acclaimed interior designers and, through them, the affluent consumer."

dedicated employees at the outset."

The brothers met and came to know Angelo and Christina Marzilli and their family also, of course, of Italian origin, and the visionary founders of Décor-Rest Furniture, "In fact, the Marzillis were our first customers! They were our mentors, they practically adopted us, and their philosophy also revolves around profoundly focused passion and honesty. They believed in us. They are part of our history."

Michael Astone added, "My father and my uncle applied their innate,

strong work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit to good effect. Their passion set them on their way, building what has emerged as a large furniture conglomerate".

Michael, also an investment banker, is Vice President Sales and Marketing of lovethatinterior.com. "It's a full, on-line retail department store, a balance of far-sighted design direction with recognition of traditional values, top-of-the-mark second millennium technology and insightful social engagement, interactive with competitions and coupon exchange. We're strate-

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"News spreads exponentially, people telling people, passing the accolades along, glowing recommendations from excited, satisfied customers informing potential satisfied customers... 'word of mouth'! It works."

a strategic decision to shift focus off the company, and they branded Superior to be a high end retailer, 'the Ferrari of furniture', where clients would get premium products and excellent service. We weren't going to compete with low-cost low-quality Chinese manufacturers. This strategy has served them well, and has allowed them to grow into new markets seamlessly.

"The brothers' core philosophy of the business back in time and to this day, was to provide excellent customer service and exceed their expectations, and this helped attract loyal customers who appreciated their quick turn-around and more personal, active hands-on approach.

"Continuously investing in state-of-the-art technology including the latest CNC (Computer Numerical Control) machinery and Copying Lathe machines programmed by our experts, has given us the competitive edge we need, together with robust

advanced designer systems." The technology permits more accessible customization, emboldens customers to customize, to use their own imaginations. Our two new manufacturing warehouses now total approximately 60,000 square feet."

Their team of more than 100 highly trained employees is engaged in all facets of the conglomerate's interests from research and development, to engineering, production, sales and marketing and customer service. Said Michael, "It's rare for me to walk into our production facility and not see my father walking around, meticulously checking all of the orders to ensure the highest quality and integrity of our products.

Said Enzo of Michael, "He (and Daniel, too) have the passion! Like their mother, Francesca, they have a unique sense of colour and they share Superior's mission."

The Astone's close-up-and-personal mindset extends to their far-reach-

ing and markedly effective communications network. Enzo emphatically declared, "We have never advertised!" Astonishingly, Superior's founders, sons and their integrated corporate family team transmit their message only by "word of mouth"! It begins in the workshops, the very tight, meticulous controls, the intimate relationships and communication between all members of the team, the shared vision and integrity of all players, and the attitude to quality, value and service. Additionally, Enzo commits project managers to monitor individual orders. The result, an impeccable high-end product, always delivered on time, as designed, exuding value and always appreciated by clients across the board of all the conglomerate's divisions. And scrupulous follow-up customer service contact enhances every transaction.

And then what happens? News spreads exponentially, people telling people, passing the accolades along,



The lovethatinteriors.com website answers all possible customer questions, includes a vibrant blog and customer testimonials to build confidence.



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"The career section of our lovethatinteriors.com website is also essentially word-of-mouth 21st century style, 'speaking' directly to qualified people who share our interests."

glowing recommendations from excited, satisfied customers informing potential satisfied customers... "word of mouth"! It works. It has worked from Superior's inception. With no diminishing outlook. "Everyone wonders what we will do next!"

And this remarkable "team", where and how do the Astones find such exceptional individuals? "We have not used an employment agency, ever," Enzo assured us. "We let our people know when we need more staff in whatever area. They come to us by (guess what?!) word of mouth. As a result, the company has become a

family affair. We have had many of the same people with us for all three decades and more. A father might bring his daughter or son, cousins, to us, and they train, they educate one another in our methods! Each one is part of our 'think tank'. Each success spurs them on to the next one."

Michael said, "The career section of our lovethatinteriors.com website is also essentially word-of-mouth 21st century style, 'speaking' directly to qualified people who share our interests and direction."

"There is a set of rules at Superior,"

continued Enzo, "policies that encourage progress, open communication between staff members and divisions. This way every individual can influence the progress of the companies and take pride in excellence. There is constant interaction and exchange of ideas. It's democracy in action." The Astones passion, honesty, enthusiasm, energy and sense of fun are contagious and encourage the teams' freedom of thought and creative reach. "We work to inspire them, show them it can be done. Lead by example; develop the right environment for teamwork.

"Think about this. We reach out from the mundane, the boredom and the monotony of cautious thought, let people think large, crazy thoughts. It makes each person's world a more exciting place; it removes borders and fences to innovative thinking. You can see a whole new world of possibilities and an appreciation of the possibilities of life. No barriers to the imagination.

"We avoid price comparisons and we urge our customers to express themselves, too, to go along with their imaginations, be creative themselves. It removes the implied restriction of showroom stock, gives them freedom. They can have a Vegas look, any look, fantasy or classicism if they want it."

And speaking of Vegas, said Enzo,

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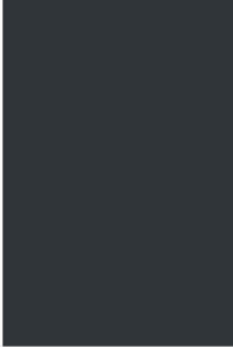
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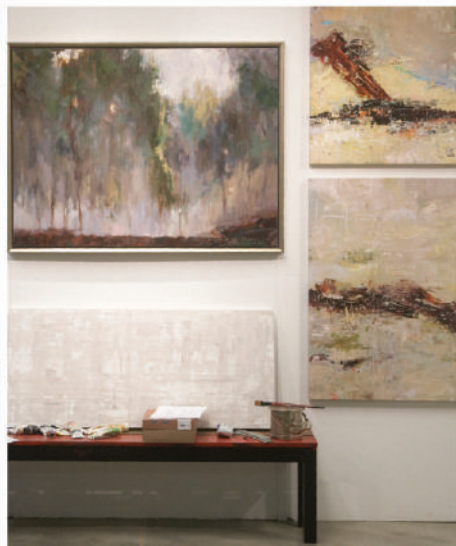
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The Astones "walk the Markets. We enjoy seeing how lines are presented. And what the trends are," Enzo continued. "Although we never copy anyone, we are sometimes influenced by them. Signature pieces, just like a painter, spark our interpretation of a style."

Michael added, "Maintaining our competitiveness requires us to be up to speed on the latest design trends. We work with the most renowned designers

to keep us on the high profile projects. This way we establish new and deepen existing relationships."

The Astone family has always been much involved in charitable outreach, always especially interested in health related projects, and embracing campaigns close to their heart. Typically, they are often the go-to people when it comes to creating unique, quality furniture pieces like a concept chair recently that would lend itself to Toronto's Princess Margaret Hospital's Pink Ribbon Cancer thrust.

Astone Home Studio also gave a sleek signature chair, "Sinatra", to the Hospital's Producer's Ball 2013, for their World Vision silent auction, an

event scheduled to take place during the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) hosted by HGTV's The Property Brothers, Jonathan and Drew Scott. The celebrity décor-duo are also ambassadors for World Vision.

The Word from Enzo directed to young aspiring entrepreneurs: "Only attempt to make your mark in the furniture industry if you have a passion for the business to the point that your life is focused around it.

"And you must commit to honesty in your dealings, always!"

The future? "New products, of course! A few more Studios. A new approach to the consumer."

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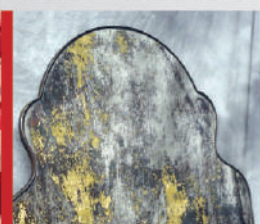
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